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CHRIST AS MADE KNOWN TO THE ANCIENT CHURCH.

CHRIST AS MADE KNOWN TO THE ANCIENT CHURCH:

AN EXPOSITION

OF

THE REVELATION OF DIVINE GRACE,

AS UNFOLDED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES.

BY THE LATE

ROBERT GORDON, D.D., F.R.S.E.,

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CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

XXXVIII.

THE GLORY OF THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION.

ISAIAH LX. 1-22.

In my remarks on the chapter preceding this, I took occasion to observe, that if we might judge of the prophet's feeling and state of mind from the nature of the communications which he was commissioned to make to his countrymen, we should conclude that he delivered or recorded the prediction contained in that chapter with great grief and heaviness of heart. On the same principle, then, I would say, that he must have given utterance to the prophecy in this chapter with feelings of the most profound admiration, and of the liveliest gratitude and joy. It had already been revealed to him that his countrymen, who, in their national capacity, formed the visible Church, containing, of course, within it the true Church, were not to be reclaimed by all that he and other prophets might address to them. Though, in the vision of the future that was opened up to him, he might see partial and temporary revivals of the true religion, yet he saw also that, ultimately, his people, as a nation, were to be rejected and cast off from being the visible Church of God, at the very

moment, too, when, if they had acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah promised from the beginning, they might have been exalted to the highest honour, as the instruments of communicating to the whole world that revelation of the divine will of which they had been appointed the keepers and guardians, and which was to be completed by the manifestation of Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write. We cannot doubt that Isaiah, like every right-hearted Israelite, had cherished the fond hope that Israel, as a nation, would one day fully accomplish the purpose for which they had been separated from the rest of the world,—that of testifying for the supremacy of Jehovah, and ultimately bringing that supremacy to be acknowledged among all the nations of the earth. But it had been revealed to him that this was not to be,—that his nation, misunderstanding the true nature of their high commission, and not knowing the day of their visitation, were to forfeit and lose the distinguishing honour of being the instruments of spreading the light of the true religion throughout the world. He was given to understand that, for the accomplishment of this glorious purpose, not only was a new dispensation required, but that the Church, under this new dispensation, would, in the first instance at least, embrace but a very small remnant of the Jewish people, and that the close of the old dispensation was to be accompanied with the execution of terrible judgments on the nation at large. The prophet was thus compelled to relinquish the pleasing hope that his countrymen, as a nation, and as the Church, were to be the means of extending the true religion to the ends of the earth; and with this prospect before him, he could not but feel depressed and discouraged by the thought, that the cause of righteousness was in danger of being altogether overthrown, and that the enemy was ready to come in like a flood, and for ever extinguish the light of divine truth.

But he found a refuge in another vision that was presented to him of the glory of the new dispensation. There he saw not only a more full and perfect revelation of God's gracious purpose of mercy towards a fallen world, but provision made for an unlimited extension of the benefits of that revelation among the nations of the earth. Under the old economy, the oracles of God were committed to one nation; and if that nation proved unfaithful to their trust, as the Jews did, there was nothing,

humanly speaking, to prevent these oracles from being altogether lost. But it was revealed to the prophet, that the faithlessness of the nominal or carnal Israel, and the judgment which, in consequence of that faithlessness, was to overtake them, was to be the commencement of a new order of things, whereby the blessings which had been long restricted to one nation were to be freely offered to all. This consideration was itself fitted greatly to comfort and encourage the prophet. But there was another, and a still more animating consideration presented to him. He was assured that, under the new dispensation, the Spirit was to be given to the Church in a larger measure than had ever been vouchsafed before,—that it was to be emphatically the dispensation of the Spirit; for the promise, as recorded at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, is on this wise, "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." With such an assurance, then, and with the prospect thereby opened up to the prophet, we can easily conceive with what joy and gladness he addressed the true Church of his own time, and of all subsequent times, in the language of this chapter, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

I have said that it must have been with joy and gladness that the prophet announced, even to the true Church of his own day,—a small remnant, I fear,—the glory of the new dispensation. It may, perhaps, be asked how this announcement could comfort them. They were never to see that glory. They were taught to expect that great and terrible judgments were to overtake the nation before, as well as at the commencement of the new dispensation. Indeed, they had little prospect of any alleviation of the sufferings to which they were then subjected. Yet the prophet addresses them as if the glory of the Lord was to rise upon them, assuming that they would be comforted and encouraged by the assurance that it was to arise, though at a future and a far distant period,—a period, as it afterwards ap-

peared, of at least seven hundred years. But the prophet knew well, from his own experience, as well as from the Word of God, that the announcement of the future glory of the true Church, however distant, would be a source of the purest consolation to the true Church of his own time, however dark might be the prospect for themselves personally, in regard not only to their temporal condition, but to their spiritual privileges. Such an announcement was to them a new assurance that God was the faithful and covenant-keeping God,—that he never would forsake or forget his Church—that, though his people might be so reduced in numbers, and brought so low in outward estate as to be well-nigh overwhelmed, yet he would maintain their cause, and sustain them under all their trials,—and that although they might, through many successive generations, be persecuted and oppressed, yet he would one day render his Church triumphant over all her enemies, and glorious in the sight of the world. And if so, then it was an assurance also that they would not be forsaken, and that however severe their afflictions might be, nothing could deprive them of their chief portion, even God's favour, which is life, and his loving-kindness, which is better than life. But besides their own personal interest in the divine favour, which was thus secured to them, it was here assumed or taken for granted, as it is everywhere in Scripture, that the people of God would find great satisfaction and comfort in contemplating the future prosperity of the Church, however distant that might be, simply on the ground that God was thereby to be glorified, and men turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. All the great and precious promises to the Church, even from the beginning, were given upon this principle,—namely, that however long was to be the period that was to elapse before these promises were fulfilled, they would be, to every successive generation of God's people, a source of comfort and encouragement, even in seasons of the greatest darkness and depression regarding the progress of the truth. The Church, in fact, was addressed as one body, united in love and sympathy, whether in joy or sorrow, from the day that a Church began to be formed out of the fallen race of Adam, down to the consummation of all things, just as if all the people of God, throughout all these successive generations, were to live

and personally share in all the events, prosperous and adverse, which were to happen to the Church; so that, at any given period, believers, looking back to God's past dealings with his people, or forward to what he had promised or threatened to do in regard to them, were supposed to feel as if they were individually concerned in all these events. Such was the feeling which they were expected to cherish, and which they have in all ages cherished, in proportion as love to God and to man has been an influential principle in their heart.

In illustration of these remarks, I might refer to the case of Abraham. It will be recollected, that the promises made to him were such as could not be fulfilled till after the lapse of many generations. Even the temporal promise of Canaan as an inheritance was to be accomplished only to his posterity, and that at the distance of four hundred years. So he was himself expressly informed. And yet, when on any occasion he was troubled and perplexed, and when God was pleased to vouchsafe consolation and encouragement to his servant, in what way was that consolation imparted? It was just by a renewal of the same promises,—not to tell him that the fulfilment of them would be hastened, so that he might personally see and share in them, but simply to give him a new assurance of the certainty with which they would be fulfilled at the time originally fixed. In all this, Abraham was distinctly given to understand that this assurance ought to be, and was expected to be a source of pure and abundant consolation to him. And so it was, as his whole history testifies. We cannot, indeed, suppose that amidst his trials, as a stranger and sojourner in the land of Canaan, he could derive any great comfort or satisfaction from the thought that, three or four hundred years after his death, his posterity would inherit, as their own, a land in which he was himself never to have a settled dwelling-place. But the promise was valuable to him, not because it involved the worldly aggrandisement of his family, but because it was a pledge of the fulfilment of another, and an unspeakably more precious promise, which was inseparably bound up with it,—namely, the assurance, that in Abraham all the families of the earth were to be blessed. This was the promise that refreshed the spirit, and reassured the heart of the patriarch, amidst all the trials of his pilgrimage in

the land of Canaan. It is plain, from his whole history, especially from the communings which he was permitted to hold with God, that he required nothing to reconcile him to all the divine dispensations towards himself personally, but the assurance that the great promise would be fulfilled,—that in the person of one descended from him according to the flesh, God would be revealed as the God of salvation, not to Abraham's family alone, but to all the families of the earth.

In the prospect of this manifestation of the divine glory, he rejoiced as if he had been personally interested in it, though he knew that he was to be gathered to his fathers many ages before the promise was or could be fulfilled. And if any farther evidence of this were required, it is furnished by the declaration of the Saviour, when he thus addressed the Jews in reference to the patriarch: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." It is no less evident, I think, that the spiritual seed of Abraham, true believers of Old Testament times, shared with him feelings of joy and gladness in the anticipation of the time, though they were never to see it, when the true religion was to prevail,—when the name of God was to be known and honoured to an extent that they had never witnessed; and that, in this anticipation, they found comfort and encouragement in those seasons of abounding iniquity, when they were depressed, almost to despondency, regarding the cause of truth and righteousness. And should not this feeling of interest in the future progress of the true religion still characterise the people of God? and should not the fulfilment of what still remains to be fulfilled of such predictions as that before us fill their hearts with earnest longings and joyful anticipations? The people of God in these last days,—that is, since the commencement of the new dispensation,—have witnessed what would have filled Old Testament saints with wonder, as well as joy and gladness, in the removal of the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, the proclamation of a free salvation to all, without exception, and the actual conversion of countless multitudes in all countries and conditions. But the Church is destined to see still greater things than these: and may it not be expected, therefore, that the anticipation of these things should fill the hearts of God's people with joy and gladness? There is reason

to fear that, with professing Christians generally, this feeling is neither very profound nor very influential, else why have their efforts for the spread of the Gospel been so few and so feeble? And, with regard to those who are not conscious of any such feeling at all, is there not reason to doubt whether the Gospel has yet been to them the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation?

The subject of these remarks is illustrated in the passage before us, as clearly, perhaps, as in any other of the manifold passages of Scripture that might be referred to. It was revealed to the prophet, as we have already seen, that a new dispensation was necessary to carry into full effect the promise made to Abraham, that through him the blessings of salvation were to be extended to all the families of the earth. But it had also been revealed to him, that his countrymen as a nation, and as constituting the visible Church, the only professing worshippers of Jehovah, instead of being the honoured instruments, as they might have been, of introducing that dispensation, were, in their ignorance, and pride, and self-righteousness, to set themselves against it, so as to bring down upon themselves the severest judgments of God, even wrath unto the uttermost, whereby they were to be rejected, so as no longer to be even the visible Church, and scattered abroad among all the nations of the earth. This was a very gloomy prospect to the prophet; and had he seen nothing beyond it, he must have been ready to despair of the cause of truth and righteousness. But he found a refuge and a resting-place in the vision that was presented to him of the glory of the new dispensation, as recorded at the close of the preceding chapter. And in this chapter he seeks to make his fellow-believers of his own time, and of all subsequent times, partakers of the same consolation and encouragement, by setting before them the glory of the Gospel dispensation, as it had been revealed to himself; nothing doubting that the true spiritual Israel, to whom he more immediately addressed himself, as well as true believers who, in subsequent times, should read his prophecy, would rejoice in the glorious events which he foretold, as if they were themselves to witness them, and participate in their blessed effects.

It is not to the Jews, then, as a nation, that the great and precious promises here recorded were addressed. It was to the true

Church, the spiritual Israel, that the prophet spoke; and it was for them that he recorded what he had spoken. No doubt, the true Church in Isaiah's day consisted of Jews, with, it may be, a few devout, believing proselytes. At the commencement of the Gospel dispensation, too, there was a remnant of God's ancient people numbered among the true disciples of Jesus; for we read of three thousand of them added to the Church in one day. And I am willing to believe, that since the day on which Peter first preached the Gospel in Jerusalem, there never has been a period at which there were not some of the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, who were also his spiritual children, numbered among the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus. But it was not to the Jews as a nation, and as constituting the visible Church, that the prophet addressed his predictions. It was to the true Church, whether Jews or Gentiles, that he spoke, assuring them that, oppressed as they then were, and hopeless as the extension of the true religion might seem to be, a time was coming when provision would be made for the spread of the truth, and for the conversion of men unto God, to an extent that had never before been conceived of. That time, as we have already seen, was the commencement of the Gospel dispensation, when the overthrow of the Jewish nation, and their rejection as the visible Church, God's professing people, instead of proving the utter extinction of the true religion, and leaving the world to be overwhelmed in idolatry and heathenism, as they might naturally have feared, would only remove an obstacle that obstructed the progress of truth, and open up a way for the communication of the knowledge of the true God to all the nations of the earth. It was not, however, the commencement alone of the Gospel dispensation that was revealed to the prophet, though that was assuredly a very glorious event, and one, therefore, to which we find many allusions in the writings of Isaiah, as well as of the other prophets. It was an event that showed at once the capabilities, if I may so speak, of that dispensation, as a system of means for spreading the true religion throughout the world. It immediately appeared that provision was then made, as the Old Testament economy had not made it, for extending to men of every country the blessings of the covenant sworn to Abraham,—even for opening up a way by which might be fulfilled the gra-

cious promise which had kept alive the faith and hope of the patriarch, and of his spiritual seed, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." And in a very short period after the apostles began their labours, this promise was largely fulfilled, not only in the conversion of many individuals to the faith of the Gospel, but in the formation of Christian Churches in many parts of the civilised world, where idolatry, from time immemorial, had maintained undisputed sway.

All this was, no doubt, foreseen by the prophet; and it must have presented to him a very glorious spectacle. But the vision which was vouchsafed to him evidently extended far beyond the commencement and first triumphs of the Gospel, glorious as these triumphs were. He contemplated the new dispensation as a whole, in its rise, its progress, and its consummation; and his description of it, therefore, does not apply exclusively to any one period. It is a representation of what the Gospel, as the dispensation of the Spirit, was fitted and designed to accomplish, and what it will in the end assuredly accomplish. The prophecy, of course, did not mean that the subjugation of the nations to the faith and obedience of the truth was to proceed in a rapid and uninterrupted course, till, in a period which men might think short, all the ends of the earth should turn unto the Lord. It is indeed said, at the close of this chapter, "I the Lord will hasten it in his time." But the Lord's time often appears to men very long; and even his own people are too often disposed to think that he is "slack concerning his promise." There is enough, moreover, in the prophecy itself, as in other prophecies of the same kind, to intimate that the progress of the Gospel was to be gradual, and that it was also to encounter opposition; for at the 12th verse mention is made of nations that would refuse to serve the Church,—that is, who would reject the Gospel and oppose it, so as not only to forfeit the blessings and privileges of the true Israel, but to subject themselves to the righteous judgments of God: "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." But, with all this, the glory of the Lord was to rise upon the Church under the new dispensation, as it had never before been manifested. The light which then came in was never to be extinguished; and, moreover, it was

no longer to be confined to one kingdom or country. Hitherto divine truth had been as a light in a dark place, illuminating one nation, while the nations around were still in the shadow of death. Nay, the very nation which enjoyed the light was sinking into darkness, and, but for a very small remnant, the light would have been utterly extinguished. Such was to be, according to this prophecy, and such actually was the state of things, at the commencement of the new dispensation. But then the light of the Church came, and then did the glory of the Lord arise upon her. And this light was not merely to remain as a contrast to the surrounding darkness. It was to be an attractive light, drawing towards it those who were in darkness, according to Jehovah's promise to Messiah, "I have given thee to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of my people Israel." "For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

The prophet, having thus announced the approach of the new dispensation, proceeds, in the 4th and following verses, to set forth, in figurative but most significant language, the glorious state to which the Church should attain under that dispensation. He describes her marvellous increase by the ingathering of her sons and daughters,—that is, the children of God from every quarter; representing them as brought in caravans from the east, and in the ships of Tarshish from the west; and with them abundance of wealth, even gold and incense from Sheba, and flocks from Kedar and Nebaioth. He contrasts her formerly low and depressed condition, when she was reduced to great weakness in regard to numbers, and to great distress in consequence of God's chastening hand, with her great prosperity and continued increase, when the sons of strangers should build up her walls, and their kings should minister unto her; "for," says Jehovah, "in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee." The prophet proceeds farther to set forth the rich provision that was made for the full enjoyment of all her religious privileges, representing the glory of Lebanon as furnished to her for beautifying the house of God, and the sons of those who were once her oppressors coming in lowly submission to acknowledge that she,

the Church, is "The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel." Formerly she had been forsaken of those who professed to be of her, and hated of all that were round about her; but now she was to be "an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations,"—the Gentiles and their kings were to minister to her support. Every thing, in fact, in her condition was to be changed for the better: "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron." The oppression which she formerly experienced was to be at an end; and the better blessings of which she was put in possession were to be sure and permanent. The Lord himself was to be her light, and God her glory; so that her sun should no more go down, nor her moon withdraw itself. All her people, being righteous, were to inherit the land, or the earth, for ever, being the branch of the Lord's planting, the work of his hands, that he may be glorified.

The language in which this prophecy is expressed is that which was most intelligible and expressive to the Church, or people of God, under the Old Testament dispensation. From the nature of that dispensation, the temporal condition of God's people, even his true people, did directly and very powerfully affect their spiritual comfort. Worldly prosperity, in so far as the nation, or people at large, were concerned, was the token of the divine favour; and worldly adversity, of whatever kind, and from whatever quarter it might come, was an indication of the divine displeasure. The true spiritual Israel, therefore, could not avoid thus interpreting God's dealings with them. Indeed, they alone would be disposed to read and interpret God's providences, either in prosperity or adversity. In like manner, freedom of access to the house of God, and the uninterrupted liberty of engaging in its appointed ordinances, formed a very large and essential part of what they regarded as the enjoyment of spiritual privileges. To the truth of this remark the Scriptures furnish abundant evidence; for in what strong and emphatic language do we there find the saints mourning over their exclusion from the house of God, the dwelling-place of his glory? If the prophet, then, was commissioned to tell the Church, God's true people, of a time coming, which, however, they were not personally to witness, when a sense of the divine favour was to be very

largely experienced, when liberty of access to God was to be fully enjoyed, and when true believers could not be deprived of these blessings and privileges, either by the apostasy of false friends or by the hostility of foes, in what other language could the prophet foretell such a state of things, if his prediction was to be alike intelligible and impressive, than that which he has here employed? To tell them of a large experience of the divine favour, of the full enjoyment of religious privileges, and of these privileges as being placed beyond the power of men to take away, he could employ no terms or illustrations so emphatic and full of meaning as the representation which he has here given of the abundance of worldly wealth, the renewed splendour of the house of God, and the subjugation of all enemies within and without, which were to characterise the time of which he prophesied. It was obviously in this way that he was to convey to the Church of Old Testament times an exalted idea of the glory of the new dispensation. And with regard to believers, who have actually witnessed that dispensation, they can have no difficulty in understanding what the spiritual blessings are which the prophet foretells, and what the glory is which he describes, though expressed in Old Testament language. Though worldly wealth is not secured to the people of God individually or collectively, they are not without abundant and still clearer intimations of the divine favour. Though the splendour of a temple and a multitude of sacrifices have passed away, God's people have readier and nearer access to him than the Church had in the old time. And of these blessings and privileges no power on earth can deprive them; for the Lord himself is their sun and shield. It is the dispensation of the Spirit, and the Spirit will be with them to enlighten and to gladden them. They shall inherit the earth; for they are the branch of the Lord's planting, and they shall be nourished, and made to grow up, that he may be glorified.

The prophecy in this chapter, then, as now interpreted, has already been largely fulfilled, and is still in progress of fulfilment. So largely, indeed, was it carried into effect at the very commencement of the Gospel dispensation, and within the short period of the apostolic age, that some commentators have considered the prophecy as specially, if not exclusively applicable to that period. It is clear, however, from the whole tenor of

Scripture, that, glorious as was the success which crowned the labours of the apostles, that success was but the pledge of still greater and more glorious things,—an assurance that provision was now made for bringing all nations to the knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and that the time will come when all nations, Jews and Gentiles, shall be brought into the Church, and when, as there is but one Shepherd, there will be only one fold. And while the people of God are thus taught to look back to what he has already done for his cause, and forward to what he has pledged his faithfulness to do, how should this prophecy not only rebuke their fears and misgivings regarding the progress of that cause, whereby their efforts have too often been paralyzed, but how should it awaken their hope, and fill them with gratitude, that there is on record such a glorious prediction, which will as surely be accomplished as God is almighty and unchangeable! To the children of God in all past times, since the day that this prophecy was announced, it has been a source of consolation and encouragement; and it will continue to be so to God's children till it be fully and finally accomplished. And as often as they remember and ponder it, can they fail to ask themselves whether they are forward or ready to use any means or influence which they may possess for bringing about a state of things which they know and believe is to be brought about by the instrumentality of human exertion? We cannot doubt that there have been, still are, and will continue to be many who are the unconscious, and, if they knew it, the unwilling instruments of fulfilling the purposes and promises of God regarding his church. But it is the privilege and the honour of God's people to be the willing agents of his pleasure,—his instruments for carrying forward his great work of grace and mercy for the salvation of sinners. And if they feel it to be an honour, they will not fail to make it a practical duty.

But this one duty of making direct efforts for the spread of the Gospel as opportunities offer, is not the only lesson which is taught and powerfully inculcated by this prophecy. It must be obvious to every one who reads with any attention, that the representation which the prophet here gives of the Gospel dispensation implies not only a greater enlargement of the Church than was provided for or could take place under the old

economy, but also a purer and more elevated character in the Church itself,—a character of more marked separation from the world, and of more entire devotedness to God. Now, though the enlargement of the Church,—that is, the extent to which the Gospel has been made known to the nations of the earth, and embraced by them,—is much less than could be desired, and though this is professedly lamented by all who make any pretensions to the character of Christians, yet what should hinder that those who do form what is called the Christian Church exhibit all that holiness, and purity, and zeal for God's glory, which are here declared to be characteristic of the Church under the new dispensation? The solemn, but most animating and encouraging call, addressed to the Church collectively in the 1st verse of this chapter, is, of course, addressed to individuals as composing that Church: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." And if every individual is not anxiously seeking to be himself a light in a dark place, seeking to draw to him those who are sitting in darkness, can he really himself be one of the children of light,—one who knows what it is to have been brought from darkness and bondage into the light and liberty of the children of God? And, in like manner, when it is said at the conclusion of the chapter that the Church collectively is the branch of the Lord's planting, it implies that every individual composing that Church is a shoot of that branch, partaking of all the life, and vigour, and fruitfulness of the branch itself. And if every individual, then, is not earnest and anxious to abound in all the fruits of holy living, can he have been himself grafted into the true vine? The fruitfulness of the Church is the fruitfulness of her individual members, and the glory of the Church is made up of the glory that is imparted to each believer personally. And how vain, therefore, and worse than vain, in regard to themselves, is the professed hope of those who are looking forward to the prosperity and glory of the Church at some future period, while it is not their great concern now to show forth the praises of Him who has called his people "out of darkness into his marvellous light!"

XXXIX.

CHRIST DECLARES HIS WORK, AND ITS EFFECTS.

ISAIAH LXI. 1-11

It is Messiah, or Christ himself, who speaks in this chapter. In the preceding chapter, the prophet had given, in the most sublime figures which the Old Testament economy could furnish, a description of the surpassing glory of the New Testament dispensation. He had there represented the true spiritual Church, which in his day was reduced to a very small remnant, as receiving accessions from all the nations of the earth, and as not only increasing in numbers, but as acquiring influence for good far beyond any thing which they ever had or could have under the old dispensation. And all this was to take place, notwithstanding the rejection of the Jews in their national capacity, and as the visible Church; nay, their very rejection was to open up the way for the gathering in of the Gentiles into the Church of God. Such was the substance of the preceding chapter. In the chapter before us, the glorious person who was to bring in this new order of things, even Christ, is himself represented as speaking. For this interpretation we have the authority of our Lord himself; for we are told by the Evangelist Luke, that soon after the commencement of his public ministry, Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and that, having opened the book of the prophet Esaias, he read this very passage; and having done so, he began to say unto them that were in the synagogue, "This day is this

Scripture fulfilled in your ears." It is Christ, then, who here speaks by the mouth of the prophet; and it is of himself, and of his work as Mediator, that he speaks. In the first three verses, he announces the gracious object of his mission, and the office with which he was invested for the accomplishment of that object; and he does so in every form of expression that can convey to poor, perishing sinners of mankind, the assurance that he has both the will and the power to finish the work which it had been given him to do. From the 4th to the 9th verse, he sets forth the blessed effects of his finished work, in the conversion to God of the nations, which, during the whole period of the Mosaic economy, had lain in ruins under the debasing weight of idolatry,—in the zeal, and activity, and devotedness with which these converted heathens would labour to promote the interests of the Church, the cause of God,—and in the honourable place which the Church was to occupy throughout the world at large. And, in the last two verses, he expresses his triumphant feeling, —a feeling, of course, in which all his redeemed people are supposed to participate,—in the prospect of his salvation being made known to all the ends of the earth, when the Lord God would "cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations."

Let us consider the passage, then, a little more particularly, according to the division which we have now made of it. And, first, in regard to Christ himself, and to the gracious work which it had been given him to do,—it will be observed that he says nothing of his sufferings,—nothing of what it was to cost him in order to his being able to do, for poor, miserable, perishing sinners, what he here says he was appointed and commissioned to do. His sufferings, indeed, had already been revealed in vision to the prophet, who has described them in a preceding chapter, the 53d, as an eye-witness might have been supposed to do. But here Christ says nothing of these sufferings. He is intent only on giving assurance to sinners of his pity, and compassion, and earnest desire to deliver them from all the ills of their fallen and helpless condition. He describes what he was sent to do in a great variety of expressions, any one of which might suffice to set forth all that is essential to his mediatorial undertaking. But in employing various forms of

describing that undertaking, he manifests, in a very affecting manner, his condescension and kindness,—showing that he is anxious to present himself to sinners in the light or under the character that was best fitted, according to their various states of mind and feeling, to assure them that he is able and willing to help them. He addresses sinners as the meek or poor,—as the broken-hearted,—as captives,—as prisoners,—and as mourners; and he declares that in the work which had been assigned to him, and which he had willingly undertaken, he was to accomplish what was specially fitted to bring enlargement and relief to all who came under any one of these classes or descriptions of persons. The description, indeed, even in all its variety, applies to every sinner of mankind, whether he is sensible of it or not; for if a sinner were really alive to his true state and character before God, and, at the same time, were utterly a stranger to the hope and consolation which Christ alone can give, he could not but feel that he is poor and broken-hearted, —that he is in captivity and bondage,—a mourner whom none can comfort; and if he does not feel that such is his condition, it is because of the insensibility of spiritual death. And even to those who are thus spiritually dead, Christ did here address himself. It is, no doubt, true that they only who were meek,— that is, humble and cast down in spirit, because of their sins,— would cordially and joyfully accept of Christ's gracious offer to interpose on their behalf, and procure for them pardon and acceptance with God. To them only his preaching would be glad tidings. But so his preaching should have been to all; and when he furnished credentials of his divine mission, and gave proofs in abundance of his divine compassion, and manifested by innumerable miracles his divine power, and then proclaimed that the great object of his mission was to preach good tidings to the meek, and to bind up the broken-hearted, what could be better fitted than such a proclamation to arrest the attention even of the most careless and unthinking, and to force upon them the question, whether they did not stand in need of something more satisfying and more enduring than they had ever yet attained to, or even desired?

There was enough, then, in the simple but very gracious declaration, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because

the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek," accompanied as it was with miracles of mercy, to arouse even the most careless and carnally-secure to inquire what such good tidings could be. Though it is still true, therefore, that the meek only,—the humble and contrite in spirit,—would feel the Saviour's preaching to be good tidings, yet that preaching was fitted to alarm, at least, the ungodly and self-secure; and if it did so, they might thereby be brought into a state of mind in which the same preaching would prove to them glad tidings of great joy. And that such was the Saviour's gracious purpose in announcing himself and his office, as he here did by the mouth of his prophet, is evident from the application which he made of this passage, as we have already seen, when, during his manifestation in the flesh, he read it in the synagogue of Nazareth, and, addressing those who were assembled there, "began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." This, of course, was spoken to all who were then present; and to all, therefore, Christ announced himself as the bearer of good tidings to the meek,—that is, the poor, the needy, and the helpless. Among those who heard the Saviour on that memorable day,—a day on which was fulfilled more than one of the predictions of Isaiah,—there might be some who felt that their condition was such as he had described; and to them his announcement would be glad tidings of great joy. But it was not confined to them. It was addressed to all who heard him. And that many,—nay, that by far the greater part, if not the whole of them,—were utterly insensible to the guilt and misery of their condition, is but too evident from what we find recorded of them by the evangelist; for though at first, when Jesus began to speak to them, "all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth," yet when he dealt directly and closely with their conscience, and set before them their true character, "all they in the synagogue were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong."

Our Lord himself, then, has taught us how this passage is to be applied, and to whom it is to be addressed. It contains a representation which is applicable to every sinner, and not the

less so that the sinner himself is not conscious of being in the condition from which Christ proposes to deliver him. And if our Lord did so apply the passage,—if he addressed it even to those who could not be brought to see that they stood in need of his graciously offered help,—how full of encouragement should this be to mourners in Zion, to those who feel that their condition is as miserable and helpless as the Scriptures represent it to be! Such persons are sometimes prone to raise the very obstacles in the way of their coming to Christ which it is the object of the Gospel to remove; so that they receive the gracious invitations whereby they are encouraged to draw near, with as much hesitancy and doubt as if they were forbidden to approach. The question will still be occurring to them, Am I the person to whom this offer is freely made? or am I yet in such circumstances as will warrant me to accept of that offer, and rest in the assurance of its being made good? When they are told that the Gospel is preached to the poor, they may be quite alive to the value of the blessing, and may be longing to participate in its consolations; but they may doubt whether they can be ranked among the poor or meek, and whether, therefore, they are warranted to rejoice in the glad tidings which it brings. They may see it to be a precious truth that Christ came to heal the broken-hearted; but they may doubt whether their sorrow has been so deep, and their contrition so bitter, as to bring them under that description. They may hear with admiration, and even with gratitude, the Saviour's declaration, that he was anointed to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; but they may doubt whether they have longed and laboured so earnestly for spiritual deliverance as to warrant them to believe that they are the kind of prisoners whom Christ came to set free.

In all this there may seem to be much humility; and they may appear to themselves to be acting with becoming diffidence, in doubting whether these proposals are addressed to them individually, until they shall have been disciplined into a certain state of penitence and contrition,—till they have worked their way, as it were, to that point where they may be fairly ranked among the meek, the broken-hearted, and the captive, who are sighing for spiritual freedom. Yet, after all, this diffidence or seeming humility may, and often does, originate in a principle

of self-righteousness. They do not reflect that their condition was all that the Scriptures represent it to be, long before they saw or would believe the humbling truth. They do not consider, that however much alive they may be to their spiritual destitution, or however deeply they may be impressed with a sense of their unworthiness, they are not more destitute and not more unworthy than they formerly were while utterly insensible to their real character and condition. And they forget that the offer of pardon and reconciliation with God was made to them, not because they felt their need, but because they needed it. For did they remember and consider all this, they never could suppose that the proposal which was made to them, at a time when they would not listen to it, will be withdrawn the moment they are made willing to embrace it. No doubt they have often been told, and told truly, that till the sinner becomes really alive to his guilt, and misery, and helplessness, he never can, just because he never will be persuaded to betake himself to Christ, as the only refuge of the guilty. But this, it is to be remembered, is the statement of a simple matter of fact; and though it is unquestionably true that a conviction of sin and misery, a humbling sense of guilt and helplessness, is a necessary step in the sinner's turning to God, it is not necessary as a qualification to entitle him to acceptance when he does return. Let those, then, who feel it to be a precious and a welcome message that Christ was anointed to preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, receive this message, even now, as addressed to themselves individually; and instead of looking forward to some future period, with the hope of being then able to embrace and rest upon it, let them receive, as part of the message, what our Lord addressed to the Jews of Nazareth, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

To the truly humble and penitent, in every possible variety of circumstances, and to believers at every stage of their progress, from the first saving impression made on their hearts, till the last hour of their spiritual warfare, the passage before us is fraught with consolation. Are they only yet at the commencement of the Christian life? Have they but lately made the

painful discovery that they stand exposed, naked, and defenceless, to all the terrors of the divine displeasure,—that the virtues of character, on which they once relied, have ceased to afford them any ground of hope,—and that their own righteousness, to which they formerly trusted, can no longer sustain them under the fears and misgivings which have broken in on their security and peace? Then they are here directed to a Saviour, who has been anointed to preach good tidings to the poorest,—those who feel themselves destitute of all righteousness,—even the good tidings of a righteousness in which the guiltiest may be clothed, and stand justified before God. Have they felt that there is a sorrow too deep-seated to be within the reach of any worldly consolation, and too permanent ever to be soothed by the healing hand of time? Then they are here assured that there is a remedy, whose efficacy extends to the deepest and deadliest wounds that sin has ever inflicted, even the blood of that compassionate Redeemer, whose divinely-appointed office it is to heal the broken-hearted, to give to "them that mourn in Zion" "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Do they feel the power of corruption within, and the strength of temptation without, bringing them at times into captivity, imposing a painful restraint on the desires that would rise to the enjoyment of communion with God, and resisting the efforts which they make to escape from the deadening influence of worldly affections? Then they are here directed to Him who has spoiled principalities and powers, and who, in virtue of his victory over the spiritual enemies of his people, has proclaimed liberty to the captive, recovering of sight to the blind, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. In every difficulty and perplexity he can direct and deliver them, and from every temptation he can provide a way for their escape. And though at times they may feel as if they were deserted, or be ready to despair of the relief which is long delayed, yet there is enough to revive their sinking spirits, and to bring them again and again to the throne of grace, where the prayer of faith was never turned away from the Hearer of prayer, and where every believer will find mercy to pardon, and grace to hlep him in time of need.

But while this passage affords every encouragement which

the sorrowful soul,—the mourner in Zion,—can desire or need, it holds out also a most solemn admonition to those who have never sorrowed at all, or never sorrowed after a godly sort; for the man who can, from time to time, read and resist such an appeal, is, humanly speaking, beyond the reach of every other representation by which the human heart can be affected. That the sinner should set at nought all that is alarming in the declarations of the divine law, and brave all that is terrible in the threatenings of the divine displeasure, is indeed very lamentable. But there is something still more fearful in the idea of his remaining unmoved and unaffected by all the compassionate remonstrances of the divine mercy, and wilfully turning a deaf ear to the earnest entreaties of redeeming love. The whole tenor of Scripture testifies, that this will be the great aggravation of the guilt and the condemnation of the finally impenitent who have heard the Gospel, but have neglected the great salvation which it reveals; and it was on this principle that the apostle reasoned, when he said, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? .... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

It appears, then, if the view which we have taken of this passage be correct, that the Church, I mean the true Church, the body of believers, consists of those who are brought to feel that they are poor and destitute, broken-hearted, captives, prisoners, mourners, whom no human sympathy could relieve or comfort. They are persons, therefore, who are very lowly and humble in their own estimation, and, of course, very contemptible in the eyes of an ungodly world, especially when few in number, as in the time of Isaiah,—and not only few in numbers, but it may be,—as it has often been,—these in the humbler walks of life, among whom there are "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble." But weak and helpless as they may be in their own estimation, and contemptible as they may appear in the eyes of scoffing and ungodly men, they are here assured, that they are to be the agents or instruments in effecting the most glori-

ous of all revolutions, that of turning men,—men of every nation, nay, whole nations,—from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. In the 4th verse, it is declared of them that "they shall build the old wastes, and raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations." Language similar to this, as we have already seen, is employed repeatedly in previous chapters, and in such a connection as to show that it refers to the reparation of moral and spiritual wastes,—or, in other words, to the propagation of the true religion throughout the world. And the honour of doing so, it is here declared, was to be conferred on the Church,—the poor, humble, despised people of God. They were to "build the old wastes," and "repair the desolations of many generations." Strangers were to stand and feed their flocks, "and the sons of the alien" were to be "their ploughmen, and their vine-dressers,"—that is, the nations who had previously been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, were to become fellow-labourers with the true Church in the vineyard of the Lord, and were to participate in the blessed fruits thereof.

As for the Church herself, that is, all true believers, they should be called "the priests of the Lord,"—or, as the apostle Peter expresses it, "a royal priesthood,"—and they should eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in the glory of the Gentiles should boast themselves. This, of course, does not mean that the Jews, as distinct from the Gentiles, were the true Church, and were to be instrumental in spreading the true religion throughout the world. It was not so. From the time of Messiah's appearing, and finishing the work which it had been given him to do, Israel as a nation were cast off from being the Church of God, even visibly and outwardly. The promise here given was to the true Church, of whomsoever it was composed. But that Church, in the time of Isaiah, consisted of Jews; and, therefore, the promise of the Church being honoured to extend the true religion was expressed in language suited to their condition,—that is, the Jews, the true believers among them, were encouraged to expect that they would be instrumental in subjugating the heathen nations, and bringing them into subjection to Messiah's kingdom And so the promise began to be, and was to a great extent ful-

filled in its literal acceptation ; for Jews, humble fishermen of Galilee, were honoured to eat the riches of the Gentiles, inasmuch as they were honoured to be instrumental in persuading innumerable multitudes of the heathen of all countries, to devote themselves, and to dedicate their substance, to the service of Christ. It was not, however, as Jews merely that they were thus honoured. It was because they were of the true Church, and the representatives thereof, that this honour was conferred on them. And it is the honour of the Church still to be fellow-workers together with God in bringing in the nations, whether Gentiles, or Jews, who have become as Gentiles, both being as waste and desolate places so long as they remain in impenitence and unbelief. The honour of being instrumental in repairing these wastes, and raising up these desolations, cannot, of course, be appreciated by an ungodly world. On the contrary, the world will ever look upon it with suspicion, if not always with contempt. It was so in the time of the prophet, and pre-eminently so at the commencement of the new dispensation, when Christ himself was despised and rejected of men, and when the apostles were described by one of themselves as "made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men," yea, "as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things." But the people of God are here assured that for all this shame they shall receive double,—that is, abundant compensation,—not only in the great success with which their work in extending the true religion was to be crowned, but in their being enabled everywhere to manifest such a character as would constrain even the world around them to acknowledge that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed ; just as it was said of the Jews of old, that they took knowledge of Peter and John "that they had been with Jesus."

And the promise has already, to some extent, been fulfilled; for often has the holy, consistent life of believers extorted from the world something like the homage of respect, and proved the means of awakening the thoughtless to inquire what it is in the Gospel that can produce such effects on human character and conduct. And, no doubt, the time will come when believers shall be not only more numerous, but more palpably distinguished from a world lying in sin ; when among the Gentiles,

and among the people, all that see them shall take knowledge of them that they have been taught of Christ; and when their influence for the conversion of unbelievers shall be more extensively manifested than we have yet seen it to be. But why should it not be so now? Already professing Christians are to be found among all the Gentile nations; and why should it not be found, as it notoriously is not, that all who see them acknowledge them as "the seed which the Lord hath blessed?" Are not professing Christians now under as solemn an obligation, and as weighty a responsibility, as professing Christians of any future period can be, to show forth the Redeemer's praise? And why, then, is it not palpable to all, that it is their great concern to do so? No doubt, this may be partly explained by the melancholy fact, that vast multitudes of professing Christians have a name only that they live, and are dead. But does no blame attach elsewhere? Are true Christians sufficiently alive to their responsibility? Do they always remember that it is not enough to be anxious and careful to hold fast the beginning of their confidence, so as not to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel for their own comfort; but that they be anxious, also, to show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light? It is alike their duty and their privilege, that they appear to all to be "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified."

But whatever may be the unfaithfulness of the Church, or her forgetfulness of her duty and her privilege at any given period, the rectitude of God is pledged for the vindication of his own cause; and, therefore, the time will come when he will make his people to be honoured of all nations, and when "all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed." And, in the prospect of this glorious consummation, Messiah himself is here represented as rejoicing: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteous-

ness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." In the 10th verse Messiah triumphs in the accomplishment of his work, and in the glorious reward which he had thereby won,—even the testimony of Jehovah the great Lawgiver, declaring that all righteousness had been fulfilled, and that Christ was entitled to all the glory and honour which were due to the full accomplishment of his great undertaking. In so far, then, as the verse refers to Christ personally, it may be considered as parallel to many other passages of Scripture, where the Saviour's triumphant resurrection and exaltation are set forth; as, for example, when it is said that God has "crowned him with glory and honour," —that "he raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory," —or, that he "hath highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name." But here there is an obvious reference to the Church. It was not for himself alone that Jehovah had clothed him "with the garments of salvation," and covered him "with the robe of righteousness." He was, indeed, personally covered with the robe of righteousness; for he had fulfilled all righteousness, satisfied the demands of justice, and magnified the divine law and made it honourable. And, in like manner, he was clothed with the garments of salvation, having triumphed in the conflict which he undertook to endure, and being, on that account, invested with the highest honour which the Father himself had to bestow. But Christ never needed to undertake such a work on his own account. It was for his people that he wrought out righteousness,—it was for them that he purchased a reward; and, therefore, he rejoiced greatly in the Lord, and his soul was joyful in his God, because he had procured the right or the authority to clothe his people with the garments of salvation, and to cover them with the robe of righteousness. And this view of the subject is confirmed by the next verse, where it is plainly declared that the subject of Messiah's rejoicing is the universal spread of the Gospel,—the extension of the blessings of his salvation to all the ends of the earth; for "the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations."

And how solemn, and at the same time how animating, are the reflections which these verses ought to suggest to believers! How should they rejoice to think that He who suffered so much

for their sakes is now in the full enjoyment of his great and glorious reward! Often, I doubt not, have they meditated with profound sympathy on all that He endured, when, as a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, he endured not only the contradiction of sinners against himself, but also the hiding of his Father's face,—the infliction of all that the righteous Lawgiver and Judge saw meet to inflict for the vindication of his holy and unchangeable law. And if they really have felt any such sympathy in the sufferings of Christ, must they not also feel a corresponding sympathy in his exaltation to glory and honour? and, independently even of their own personal interest in the blessed effects of his sufferings and death, must they not feel great satisfaction and delight in the thought, that now he has been removed infinitely beyond the reach of all pain and suffering, and is in the enjoyment of all the glory and blessedness which the Father has to bestow? But how should this feeling of interest in the sufferings and exaltation of Christ be deepened upon their minds, when they reflect that he suffered for them,—that for them alone he undertook to be humbled, and that their salvation is, in his estimation, next to the glory of his Father, the great reward or joy that was set before him, as a full compensation for all that he endured! It was the joy and rejoicing of his heart that, as Mediator, he acquired, by his obedience unto the death, a right or power to clothe his people with his own perfect righteousness, wherein they might be accepted in the sight of God, and to adorn them also with the beauties of holiness, whereby they might be fitted for being introduced into the presence of God, and qualified for enjoying the blessedness of the divine presence. And if they remember and deeply ponder this truth, how should it quicken them, not only to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure, but to seek earnestly to be beautified with all the graces and the holiness of the Saviour's character, so that he may recognise his own likeness in them, and may rejoice over them, seeing in them of the travail of his soul, and being satisfied, and not being ashamed to call them his brethren in the presence of his Father and their Father, of his God and their God!

XL.

CHRIST'S CONTINUAL INTERCESSION.

ISAIAH LXII. 1-12.

In the preceding chapter, the prophet speaks in the name and person of Messiah, who is represented as saying of himself, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." And for this interpretation we have the Saviour's own authority, inasmuch as we find him expressly applying the passage to himself, in his discourse to the Jews in the synagogue at Nazareth. And if so, then it is plain, I think, that it is Christ also who speaks in the chapter before us; and the subject on which he speaks is still his mediatorial work,—his gracious undertaking on behalf of his Church. At the close of the preceding chapter, he had foretold the blessed effects of his accomplishment of that undertaking, when he was to be glorified in his people, not only by delivering them from condemnation, but by so adorning them with all the beauties of holiness as to make manifest in them the power of his redeeming grace in the sight of all nations: "For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." And at the commencement of this chapter, he proceeds to assure his people that he would never cease carrying on

his undertaking, till all the glorious results which he had foretold were fully realised: "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."

The meaning of the figurative language here employed regarding Zion and Jerusalem is abundantly obvious, being similar to what we find everywhere used in the prophetical writings respecting the Church. It was a prediction of the time when the character of the true Church, as contrasted with that of a world lying in sin, should be more fully and clearly manifested, and when her influence should be more powerfully and more extensively felt than at any former period. The Church, from the beginning, had been raised up to reflect the glory of her great Head, and so to be a light in the midst of a world sunk in the darkness of ignorance and idolatry; and she had never altogether ceased, more or less clearly, to exhibit that light. There were times, indeed, when it shone but very dimly,—or rather, to all appearance, was well-nigh extinguished,—for there were times when the true people of God were so few in number, and when, through abounding iniquity, they became so cold, as to lift but a feeble testimony for God and for his truth. And so it was at the time the prediction before us was delivered. There might, indeed, be multitudes who still frequented Jerusalem and ascended Mount Zion professedly to worship the true God. But the true worshippers were few and sorely depressed; for we find this same prophet Isaiah thus testifying concerning his own times, "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." The light, then, which the Church at that time gave forth, must have been very faint. And it was destined to be still fainter; for, with some occasional revivals of a partial kind, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem continued to degenerate, till the long-threatened judgment of captivity overtook them. And though from this captivity they were delivered, and Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt, yet they again fell away, if not into idolatry as their fathers had done, at least into a cold and lifeless formality; so that at the time Messiah appeared, the true Church was as weak in regard to num-

bers, and as feeble in respect to moral influence, as it ever had been, perhaps, at any former period. Still, even then there was a remnant. The light which emanated from the Church, though faint, was not extinguished; and it was here foretold not only that it would revive, but that the revival would be more glorious in consequence of the very feebleness to which it had been reduced. In a preceding chapter, we find the prophet thus addressing the Church in her low and depressed state: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

This prediction of the prophet is in substance what, in the chapter before us, Messiah himself is represented as declaring that he would accomplish on behalf of his Church. The promise implied that she was in a low and depressed condition,—that she was disregarded at least, if not despised, by an ignorant and ungodly world, there being nothing about her which men recognised as a proof that she was the special object of the divine favour,—and that from this state of obscurity and contempt he would procure her exaltation to a state of distinction and honour. He assured her that her righteousness should "go forth as brightness," and her salvation "as a lamp that burneth;" or, in other words, God would make it manifest that she was the object of his favour and approbation, and would work out a deliverance for her which should constrain men to acknowledge that her salvation was of him. There is here an obvious reference, I think, to what is stated at the 10th verse of the preceding chapter, where Messiah says of himself, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." Christ spoke this of himself in reference to his mediatorial work, wherein he undertook to fulfil all righteousness, and having done so, he was exalted to glory and honour, in testimony of his having finished the work which his Father gave him to do. But the righteousness which he fulfilled, or wrought out, was wrought out, not

on his own account, but on behalf of his Church,—those whom he had undertaken to redeem; and as that righteousness, therefore, was to be made over or imputed to them, so they were to participate also in all the blessed effects which it was to produce,—even in all the glory, and honour, and blessedness, to which Christ himself was to be exalted. If Christ, then, was clothed "with the garments of salvation," and covered "with the robe of righteousness," it was that he might invest his people with the same righteousness, for their acceptance with God, and might adorn them with the holy beauty of his own character, and so fit them for the enjoyment of the blessedness with which his righteousness has been rewarded. And, accordingly, he declared by the mouth of his prophet, in the passage before us, that he would assuredly do all this for his Church; and not only so, but that he would make it plain and palpable to all that he had done it,—that the Church was righteous before God, enjoying his favour and approbation,—and that she had experienced also salvation from the power of sin and Satan, being adorned with the beauties of holiness, even the graces of the Saviour's own character. Her righteousness shall "go forth as brightness," and her salvation "as a lamp that burneth."

This language would itself seem to intimate, that the predicted deliverance of Zion, the restoration of Jerusalem, or, in other words, the revival of the true religion, would not only equal, but greatly exceed in glory any thing that had ever been witnessed, even in the purest times of the Church,—that the light which was to emanate from her should be brighter, and that the influence which she was to exercise should be more powerful and extensive, than at any former period of her history. And this is fully confirmed by what is immediately added: "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." There was a time, indeed, in the former history of the Church, when Jerusalem attracted the notice and drew forth the admiration of mighty sovereigns; for we are told concerning Solomon, that "the queen of Sheba, when she heard of his fame, came to prove him with hard questions," and that "all the kings of the earth" sought his presence, "to hear his wisdom that God had put in his heart." But the outward pro-

sperity of the visible Church, in the days of Solomon, was but a type of what the spiritual glory of the true Church was to be at the time here foretold, when a greater than Solomon should appear. That glory was not to consist in a display of temporal power and grandeur, such as the world naturally admires and does homage to. On the contrary, it was to be such as the world naturally fears and hates,—even a manifestation of a righteous and holy character, the reflected glory of Him against whom the kings of the earth, for a time at least, were to set themselves, and the rulers were to take counsel together. Ultimately, they, too, will be brought into subjection to the King of kings, and will esteem it their highest honour to serve him. But whether they should be rebellious or submissive,—whether the Church should be hated or admired by them,—it is here foretold that they would not be able to shut their eyes to the image of her divine Head, as reflected in her character: "The Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory."

And that it is the spiritual glory of the Church that is here spoken of is farther evident from what follows: "And thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God." The Church is here called "a crown of glory," and "a royal diadem," in accordance with other passages of Scripture, where in similar language the salvation of his people is represented as the glorious reward of Messiah, for all that he did and endured on their behalf. Thus he was foretold by Zechariah under the name of "the Branch," on whose head crowns were to be set, because he was to "build the temple of the Lord," and should "bear the glory," and should "sit and rule upon his throne," and should "be a priest upon his throne." It is declared of Christ, in the New Testament, that because of the accomplishment of his mediatorial work he has been crowned "with glory and honour." And in the book of Revelation he is represented as having on his head "many crowns." In like manner, but, of course, in a subordinate sense, the apostle speaks of those who, by the instrumentality of his ministry, had been converted unto God, or built up in the faith, as his crown. "For what," says he, writing to the Thessalonians, "for what is

our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." The Church, then, is here represented as "a crown of glory" and "a royal diadem" in the hand of Jehovah, the great Lawgiver and Judge, to be by him placed on the head of Messiah, who was to purchase her with his own blood. And while he was thus to be glorified in and by her, she was, in like manner, to be honoured by him; for she was to "be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord should name." What this new name was is stated in the 4th verse, from which it appears that by a new name we are to understand a new state or condition,—a state of larger privileges, of higher attainments in holiness, and a corresponding increase of happiness: "Thou shalt no more be termed," or thy name shall no longer be, "Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzibah," that is, my delight is in her, "and thy land Beulah," that is, married; "for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married."

In the time of Isaiah, when this prophecy was delivered, as well as at the advent of Christ, when it was about to be fulfilled, and indeed very often, almost always, through the whole period of the Old Testament dispensation, the true Church was apparently forsaken and desolate, being so few in number, and often so infected by the prevailing sins of the time, as to be hardly distinguished from the formal and hypocritical multitude of the visible Church, while these again differed little from the heathen nations around them. In such circumstances, the light which emanated from the Church, even the true Church, must have been very faint,—the testimony which she lifted up for God must have been very feeble; and in proportion as her love waxed cold, her faith would become weak, her hope less bright, and her spiritual comfort less abundant. The Church in Old Testament times must thus have been frequently involved in great darkness; and that darkness must have been greatly increased by the temporal judgments with which the more grievous sins of the people at large were visited,—judgments in which the true Church necessarily participated, and which she could not help regarding as tokens of the divine displeasure. She must thus

have often felt that she was indeed forsaken and desolate; and but for the gracious messages which the prophets were at such seasons commissioned to carry to her, she must have sunk into despondency. But such messages she did, from time to time, receive; and one of these, peculiarly fitted to revive her faith and hope, is recorded in the passage before us. She was there assured that she was not forsaken; for that, notwithstanding all that she then suffered, the time would come when she should receive a new name, which the mouth of the Lord should name,—that she should be brought into a new and a better condition, when she should be no more called Forsaken and Desolate, and that the word of Jehovah himself was pledged to accomplish this. Those who constituted the true Church, at the time this prediction was uttered, might not live to witness the change which was foretold. But the prediction was not on that account devoid of interest, or lacking in consolation to them; for the prophecy which assured them that such a change would infallibly take place, did also carry with it necessarily an assurance, that if they did cleave unto the Lord, and make him their refuge, he would not forget or forsake them,—that the preservation of the true Church was essential to the fulfilment of the promise, and that however much, therefore, they might be oppressed, or however sorely afflicted, they could not be cast off or utterly forsaken. And thus, however distant the fulfilment of the promise might be, still it was a promise from which the Church of that and of all future times could not fail to draw abundant consolation and encouragement: "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shall be called My Delight, and thy land Married: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

The great change in the condition of the Church, which was thus foretold, began to take place when, in the fulness of time, Christ appeared in the character in which he had announced himself by the mouth of the prophet in the preceding chapter: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath

sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." When Christ had personally executed the office to which he was thus appointed, and, by the decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem, had finished the work which his Father gave him to do,—and when, in testimony of the Father's approbation of that work, he rose again from the dead, and ascended up on high, and, according to his promise, poured out of his Spirit on the apostles,—there followed such a revival of the true religion as had never before taken place, so that the "righteousness" of Zion went forth "as brightness," and the "salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." Nor was it merely a revival of true spiritual religion whereby the Church shone with a light and a glory which she had never before exhibited. There was such a change wrought in her condition as rendered it more clear and palpable than it had ever before been, that she was the special object of the divine favour, and that she should no more be termed "Forsaken," or "Desolate." She was not, indeed, exempted from temporal distress, nor was there secured to her a temporal inheritance. But such an inheritance had no longer, in her estimation, the value or the importance which it formerly had; nor did she any more regard even the severest persecution of her enemies as a token of the divine displeasure. On the contrary, she gloried even in tribulations, and rejoiced that she was counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ. The light, too, which thus emanated from the Church was seen by the Gentiles, and kings were compelled to recognise it. They did not, indeed, always acknowledge it to be light from heaven. On the contrary, they hated it, because they loved darkness; for the apostles, at the very commencement of their labours, experienced in themselves, as they had witnessed in their divine Master, the fulfilment of what had been written by the psalmist, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed." But this very opposition served to make it more evident, that He who was for his Church was greater far than all that could be against her, and that, therefore, she never could be forsaken or desolate; for, in spite of this opposition, and often

in consequence of it, the light of the Church spread rapidly among the Gentiles, so that the apostles themselves lived to see multitudes of all nations turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

But though, even at this early period, there was a large fulfilment of the promise to the Church, "The Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory;" yet, viewing the passage before us in connection with many similar predictions in this same book, we must conclude, I think, that even the glory of the apostolic age was but a partial fulfilment of what was here foretold,—that the light which then broke forth from Jerusalem, and spread so rapidly through a dark and idolatrous world, is destined to be still brighter and more penetrating, and that the full accomplishment, therefore, of the promise is yet future. But the full accomplishment of that promise is infallibly certain; for Messiah himself here says, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." This language expresses very strongly the earnestness with which the Saviour prosecuted his mediatorial work during his manifestation in the flesh, when he ceased not to speak and to work, preaching the glad tidings of pardon to the guilty, and, by his miracles of mercy, demonstrating the divine authority by which he spoke, and illustrating the nature of the great salvation which he had come to work out. But the same language does as emphatically declare, that he will never cease from his great mediatorial work, until the glorious result here foretold shall be realised,—that he will not cease to make intercession, and to exercise his divine power on behalf of his Church, until her "righteousness" shall "go forth" over all the earth "as brightness," and her "salvation" "as a lamp that burneth."

But if so,—if Christ has never held his peace from interceding, and has never rested from acting for the furtherance of his own cause, the extension of his own kingdom,—why, it may, perhaps, be asked, has not that kingdom, long ere this, embraced all the kingdoms of the earth? and why has his cause still to maintain a conflict, and sometimes an apparently unequal one, with error, infidelity, and ungodliness in every form? This is a question which has been often put by the enemies

of Christ's cause; and often secretly entertained, I suspect, by those who would not willingly be ranked among his enemies. Perhaps it were a sufficient reply to the question to say, that known unto Him are all his works from the beginning; and that however dark and mysterious his dispensations may appear to be, he has not forgotten, and will not falsify his promise; and that he will one day make it appear to the satisfaction of his people, and to the confusion of his enemies, that he has never ceased to intercede and to act on behalf of his Church. But the general tenor of his dealings with the Church, from the beginning, furnishes a farther reply to the question, and one which is fraught with important practical instruction. It appears from the history of these dealings, that the fulfilment of the richest and most notable of his promises to the Church was, according to men's estimate of time, long delayed. Abraham's posterity did not come to the possession of Canaan, which had been promised to them, and to their fathers, till four hundred years after the promise was first given; and in regard to the great promise, made in the hearing of Adam, and renewed to Abraham, even the promise of the great Deliverer, the seed of the woman, who was to bruise the serpent's head, four thousand years elapsed before it was carried into effect. But now that both these promises have been fulfilled, who will allege that a divine power was not constantly operating to bring about their accomplishment, and that, when the accomplishment did take place, the long delay served but to bring out more clearly the infinite wisdom, the almighty power, and unchangeable faithfulness of Him who determines all things according to the counsel of his will?

But the manifestation of the divine sovereignty and perfections was not the only consequence of the long delay, the seeming slackness in the fulfilment of the divine promises. Provision was thereby, also, made for exercising the faith and patience of the Church; and to this exercise of the faith and patience of the Old Testament saints we are indebted for those holy examples which stand recorded for the instruction, and reproof, and encouragement of the Church in all subsequent times. And can the Church now, with the clearer revelation which she has of the principles of the divine government, doubt that Christ is faithful to the promise here recorded: "For Zion's sake will

I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." Can she doubt that he is overruling all events, though she may not see how, for the furtherance of his cause, and the final establishment of his kingdom? And can she fail to have learned the lesson, taught and inculcated by all God's former dealings with his people, that one of the purposes to be accomplished by the seeming delay in the fulfilment of his promise, is to exercise her faith and patience, —to bring her into and keep her in a state of earnest and longing expectation for the time when "the Gentiles shall see her righteousness, and all the kings her glory." This is the attitude in which all true believers are required and expected to be habitually found,—each of them in his own sphere seeking to reflect more clearly the image of Christ, and all of them uniting to make the glory of that image more manifest to the world around them. How sad were it, then, to find that the seeming slackness in the fulfilment of the promise, regarding the universal spread of the Gospel, produces the very opposite effect on believers! And yet, is there not reason to fear that it frequently does so,—that instead of becoming more anxious for the fulfilment of the promise, the longer that it is delayed, they come to regard it as a thing that they hardly expect,—that the slow progress of the truth, together with the many and apparently insurmountable obstacles that oppose it, creates in their minds something like a feeling of hopelessness regarding its final triumph,—and that thus, though they would tremble at the thought of cherishing or expressing the sentiment of the scoffer, they are, nevertheless, entertaining the question which the ungodly are forward to put, "Where is the promise of his coming?"

But the practical lesson of the Church's duty which may thus be plainly deduced from Messiah's gracious promise, recorded in the first verses of this chapter, is expressly and very emphatically inculcated in the subsequent verses. At the 6th verse, Messiah is represented as saying, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make

Jerusalem a praise in the earth." By the expression, "watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem," we are obviously to understand the office-bearers in the Church; and the very purpose of their appointment is here declared to be, that they may constantly watch, and labour, and pray for her extension and prosperity. It is said of them that they will do so,—a declaration which does very emphatically express the heavy responsibility which rests upon them; implying that if they cease to do so, they belie their profession, betray their holy trust, and do what they can to defeat the great purpose for which their office was instituted. In accordance with this, we find unfaithful watchmen, and the lamentable consequences of their unfaithfulness, thus described in a preceding chapter: "All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, yea, all ye beasts in the forest. His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber." But it is not of watchmen alone that the duty here inculcated is required. To all "that make mention of the Lord,"—that is, to all God's people, the whole Church,—it is said, "Keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." This language is very strong and expressive. It implies, on the one hand, that the extension of the Church, the progress of the true religion, was at times to be very slow,—so slow, that it might almost appear as if God had forgotten his promise, and had ceased to interpose for the furtherance of his own cause. And, on the other hand, it not only permits and encourages, but commands the people of God to be as earnest and as importunate as if they had to do with one who was unwilling to grant their request. And this, it will be remembered, is the doctrine which was taught anew by our Lord in the days of his flesh, when "he spake a parable" unto his disciples, "to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

And what an exalted view is here given of the privilege as well as the responsibility of believers! By the injunction here laid upon them to be importunate and unceasing in prayer, till God shall "establish" and "make Jerusalem a praise in the earth," —till the Church shall embrace men of every kingdom, and tongue, and nation, and people,—they are invited to the honour

of being fellow-workers with the Saviour himself,—to participate in the very work in which he himself is engaged, even now in his exalted and glorified state. It is his own declaration at the beginning of this chapter, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." And this gracious assurance is followed up by the equally gracious injunction to his people, "Ye that make mention of the Lord,"—or, ye that are the Lord's remembrancers,—"keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." And this injunction is accompanied with a promise, that their prayer will in God's own time be answered; for the remainder of the chapter is occupied with a description of the spiritual glory which the Church is one day to exhibit throughout the whole world, expressed, of course, as is usual in the writings of the prophets, under the figure of great temporal prosperity to the literal Judah and Jerusalem. The Church, then, is here taught very plainly and emphatically,—what, indeed, the general tenor of Scripture teaches,—that though Christ is exalted to universal sovereignty, and is unceasingly exercising his mediatorial offices on behalf of his Church, and though he needs no aid for the accomplishment of the work which he has pledged his power and faithfulness to accomplish, yet he does not dispense with the prayers and labours of his people for the furtherance of his cause in the world. He has here expressly declared, that if he has assured them of his unceasing intercession, and his constant interposition on their behalf, it is that they may be excited, and encouraged, and constrained to pray and to labour for the advancement of his kingdom. And he has thus plainly intimated to them, that if the progress of that kingdom appears at times to be arrested or retarded, it becomes them to inquire whether they have not become faint and faithless in the part which has been assigned to them. There is surely enough in the honour thus conferred upon them of being fellow-workers with the Saviour, if they did but realise and remember it, to awaken and keep alive in their minds a holy earnestness of desire for the spread of the Gospel, the going forth of the glory of the Church reflecting the glory of her living Head. And

while their earnestness and perseverance in prayer for this great object must redound to the honour of the Redeemer, it will be not less conducive to their own spiritual health and comfort. For what is better fitted to elevate their affections and feelings above every thing that would debase them, and that would bind down their hearts to earthliness, than to have their minds frequently and seriously exercised about the manifestation of the Saviour's glory, and the visible demonstration of his supremacy in the subjugation of all nations to his holy and righteous government?

I am supposing, of course, that the interest which they feel in the advancement of Christ's cause is not confined to those seasons which they statedly set apart for devotional exercises, and when it is hardly possible for them to fail recollecting that one of their petitions ought to be, "Thy kingdom come." There is scarcely a nominal Christian who can forget this. But I am supposing that true Christians will seek to have upon their minds a feeling of interest in the progress and finally universal establishment of the kingdom of Christ at all times, as well as during their stated seasons of devotion; and that in all the events which are constantly occurring to arrest the attention of men,—as calculated to affect the interests of society,—they will see enough to prompt the question, How are these events to affect the spread of the Gospel? They may not be able to answer this question; nor will they venture to speculate upon it beyond what they are warranted by the plain declarations of Scripture, and the clear leadings of Providence. But the habit of thus connecting all events with the development of the divine purposes regarding the Church is a very wholesome habit. The mind is thereby pre-occupied with a high and holy subject, to the exclusion of those vain and idle imaginings which, in seasons of leisure or of languor, do too frequently make sad inroads on the spiritual health even of believers. Let it be remembered, too, that in thus seeking to cherish an habitual feeling of interest in the extension of the Church, their minds are going forth in the same direction with the mind of Christ,—their thoughts are in accordance with his,—they are longing for that which he intercedes for, and for which he is exercising his divine power; and, therefore, they are cherishing a feeling which must be approved of by

him. I do not speak of the exertions which it is their duty and their privilege to make for accomplishing the object of their earnest desire; for, where the desire is, the exertion will not be wanting. But what is here especially brought before us is the earnest longing, and the persevering prayer for the advancement of the kingdom of grace, which ought to characterise all true believers; and while the blessed effects of cherishing such a spirit cannot fail to be a matter of experience in the growing holiness of their own soul, and in their growing peace and comfort, they are encouraged to believe that their prayers will not be without effect, in bringing about the glorious state of things which they long and pray for. They cannot doubt, from what is so plainly said here, as well as in other parts of Scripture, that among the various means and instruments whereby Christ carries on to its consummation his mediatorial work, a place has been assigned to the prayers and supplications of his people; and that when the consummation has taken place, it will be made clear to themselves that there is therein an answer to the petitions which they presented to God, when they kept not silence, and gave him no rest, to the intent that he might "establish," and might "make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

XLI.

WHO IS THIS THAT COMETH FROM EDOM?

ISAIAH LXIII. 1-19.

TOWARDS the close of the preceding chapter, it had been foretold of the Church, that she was to receive such vast accessions from the world around her,—that is, by the conversion of the heathen nations,—as would not only raise her from the depressed and despised condition to which she had been reduced by the apostasy of Israel as a nation, but would render her more glorious than she had ever been at any former period of her history: "Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him,"—that is, Messiah cometh, or manifesteth himself to his Church, having his reward with him, and his work before him,—namely, the trophies of his redeeming grace and power, even from the ends of the earth. But great as was to be the increase of the Church, the extension of Messiah's kingdom, it was not to be without opposition. Though the preaching of the Gospel, the proclamation of a free salvation to men of every kindred and nation, was to be accompanied with a divine power, whereby countless multitudes were to be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, being made the willing subjects of Christ's spiritual kingdom; yet there were multitudes also,—I fear, still greater multitudes,—who would be found not only rejecting Messiah's gracious proposals, but obstinately resisting his

authority and power. It had been so in all former times, as the true Church knew in her bitter experience; for she had always been the object of enmity to ungodly men, who, by reviling, persecuting, and oppressing her, had manifested their enmity against God himself. Notwithstanding, therefore, the great and gracious promises contained in the preceding chapter, respecting the efficacy of the truth, in subduing and making men willing in a day of Messiah's power, the Church might still entertain some fears and misgivings in regard to her ungodly enemies, whose malignity and power she had so often and so bitterly experienced. But she was assured, in the communication contained in the first six verses of this chapter, that however numerous her enemies might be, or however bitter their enmity, so far from prevailing against her, they would, by their hostility, only bring upon themselves utter and irretrievable ruin.

This assurance was conveyed to the prophet in a vision, wherein he beheld, in the person of a mighty conqueror returning from the slaughter of his adversaries, a representation of Messiah executing judgment on his obstinate and impenitent enemies. The prophet, filled with admiration and awe, on beholding the glorious vision, exclaims, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?" To this the divine person replies, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." The prophet farther inquires, "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat?" and he receives for answer, "I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment." It is sufficiently obvious, from the passage itself, that this language is a figurative representation of the terrible judgments which must ultimately overtake the impenitent workers of iniquity, especially those who have manifested hostility to Christ and his cause; for it is in connection with the redemption of his people that these judgments are here declared to be in reserve for their enemies. But it is not in this passage only that such language is employed to set forth the execution of divine judgments,—the manifestation of the wrath of the

Lamb against his adversaries. In the 19th chapter of Revelation, we find a passage which strikingly resembles that before us, in more points than one. Here Messiah announces himself to the prophet by the title, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save;"—that is, I who speak in truth and faithfulness,—I who promise, and am able to perform. The same title, but more fully expressed, is given to Christ, as he appeared in vision to John, who says, "I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. As Messiah appeared to the prophet, he was "red" in his "apparel," and his "garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat;" and his appearance was thus explained by himself, "I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment." And so, in the vision which appeared to John, the same glorious person, as well as the purpose of his appearing, is thus described, "And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called, The Word of God..... And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

The import of the vision, then, which was presented to the prophet, was the destruction of the enemies of Messiah, under the appalling figure of being trodden in the wine-press. And there is a peculiar force given to the vision by the allusion to Edom, and to Bozrah, which was an ancient city of that country. It will be recollected that, in various passages of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Edomites, or inhabitants of Edom, the descendants of Esau, are declared to have been among the bitterest and most malignant enemies of ancient Israel; and we find, accordingly, that many special and very severe threatenings are addressed to them in the writings of the prophets. It appears, moreover, that, on account of the guilty pre-eminence which they held among the adversaries of Israel, their name is employed to represent, generally, the enemies of the Church; and in their predicted overthrow is foretold the destruction which

must sooner or later overtake the impenitent enemies of Christ and his cause. Of this we have an example, I think, as early as the time of Balaam, who, in his remarkable prophecy of the power and supremacy of Messiah, especially mentions Edom in connection with the manifestation of that power. In this same book, too,—the 34th chapter,—we find a judgment denounced especially against Edom or Idumea, while it is evident, from the whole scope of the passage, that it was a judgment on all the enemies of God and of his Church: "The indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. . . . . For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of the Lord is filled with blood; it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea." The similarity of this prediction to that in the passage before us is abundantly evident. Here, the glorious person who appeared in vision to the prophet is represented as coming up from the execution of the judgment formerly denounced against the land of Edom, and its ancient city, Bozrah,—intimating thereby Messiah's triumph over all his enemies of all times,—even the most malignant and the most powerful of them: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. . . . . I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people,"—the nations,—"there was none with me,"—none my friends, but all mine enemies; "for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come,"—that is, the time is come when I must vindicate my own supremacy and faithfulness, by avenging the blood of my redeemed, which their enemies have shed. "And I looked, and there was none to help,"—as if he had said, I looked, if, peradventure, those who were the enemies of my Church might have turned to be her friends, and helped

her; but there was none to do so,—none of the nations, as a nation; "and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore, mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth."

The purpose of the revelation, then, that was thus made to the prophet, was to convey to the Church of all times the assurance that however numerous, or inveterate, or apparently successful, her enemies might for a time be, they never should prevail against her, and that their impenitence and hostility could only terminate in their own destruction. This prediction has already been verified, as often as a divine interposition has taken place for the protection of the Church, and for the infliction of righteous retribution on those who oppressed and persecuted her; and it will be fully and fearfully verified at last, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." But there was one remarkable occasion on which the prediction was to be largely fulfilled, but which, to the Church herself, could hardly fail to appear dark and mysterious,—I mean the terrible retribution which overtook the Jews as a nation, because of their rejection of Christ, and their inveterate hostility to his cause and people. It cannot, I think, be doubted, that the prediction before us, while it announced, generally, the judgments which would assuredly overtake the impenitent enemies of the Church, had a special reference to the manifestation of the divine displeasure against the Jewish people, when wrath came upon them to the uttermost. It appears from the general tenor of this chapter, as well as of the preceding and following, that at the time when the communications which they contain were made to the prophet, he was carried forward in vision to Messiah's day,—that he was placed, as it has been well expressed, at the critical or turning point between the old and new dispensations,—that he saw the state of things at that eventful period as it afterwards appeared to the believing Jews who actually witnessed it,—and that, accord-

ingly, he felt and spoke regarding it as they might be supposed to feel and speak. And what was the vision which was thus presented to the prophet? We have already seen what it was. He beheld, on the one hand, the true Church raised from a state of great depression and weakness, to a more honourable and glorious condition than she had ever before occupied, provision being made for bringing in to her all the nations of the earth. But he saw, on the other hand, the rejection of Israel as a nation, and the execution upon them of the terrible judgments here foretold, there being only a small remnant of them who recognised and embraced Messiah. And how must that remnant have regarded the calamities which came upon their countrymen? No doubt, they would bow in lowly and reverential submission to Him who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, and would acknowledge the rectitude of his dealings with those who still held out in stout-hearted rebellion against the Lord and against his Anointed; and they could not fail, moreover, to see, in the judgments which came upon Judah and Jerusalem, a proof of the divine faithfulness in regard to the Church, a pledge that the gates of hell should never prevail against her. But, with all this, they could not look on such calamities with other than feelings of the deepest commiseration for their unhappy brethren personally; nor would they be able to contemplate, without the deepest regret, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the rejection of their countrymen, as a people, from being what they had long been,—the peculiar people of God.

Though the believing Jews exchanged their carnal expectations for spiritual views of Messiah's kingdom, and no longer regarded temporal prosperity and national glory as the blessings which Christ came to dispense, yet we cannot suppose that they could easily, or without a struggle, relinquish the hope that their countrymen, as a nation, would participate in the spiritual blessings of Messiah's reign, equally, at least, with the Gentile nations, if not to a still greater extent. We know that the apostles themselves did for a time believe that the Gospel was to be preached exclusively to the Jews; and so long as they held this opinion, they must have supposed that Gentile nations could partake of the blessings and privileges of the Gospel only by becoming proselytes to the Jewish religion. We know, too,

from the Acts of the Apostles, and from the epistles to the Churches, how difficult it was to convince the converted Jews that the observance of the Mosaic institutions was not necessary to salvation. We can easily conceive, therefore, that believing Jews, generally, would long cling to the hope that, even under the new dispensation, their people, as a people or nation, would occupy a very prominent, at least, if not the first place, in the Church,—that Jerusalem, where once dwelt the symbol of God's presence, in the cloud of glory over the mercy-seat, would still be the place where, in a special manner, the promise of Christ would be fulfilled, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,"—and that if in Abraham all the families of the earth were to be blessed, his own family, his descendants according to the flesh, would surely participate, at least as largely as others, in that blessing. We cannot suppose that, so long as Jerusalem stood, the believing Jews could cease to cherish hopes like these. And what, then, must have been their feeling when they beheld that city in the possession of the Gentiles, the temple laid in ruins, and their countrymen scattered abroad among all the nations of the earth! They themselves, indeed, through faith in Christ, had been begotten again to the lively hope of a better inheritance than Canaan had ever been, and were, therefore, independent of all temporal blessings for their main happiness. But that very hope would make them more feelingly alive to the destitute condition of their brethren,—their kinsmen according to the flesh; and when they saw, in God's terrible judgments, a plain intimation that he was about to reject and cast off Israel as a people, they would feel that it was a national calamity, in which they were personally concerned. In their deep commiseration for their unhappy country, they would identify themselves with their brethren in their sufferings, and would be ready to say, in humiliation and sorrow, "Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised thee is burned up with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste."

And such was the state of mind and feeling of the believing Jews at the memorable period referred to, as we find it expressed by the prophet, speaking in their name, in this and the follow-

ing chapter. He was carried forward in vision, as I have already remarked, to the termination of the old and the commencement of the new dispensation; and, having witnessed the execution of the judgments denounced in the first six verses of this chapter, he gives utterance to the feelings naturally awakened by these judgments, speaking in the name of those believing Jews who were actually to be eye-witnesses of the calamities which were to come on their country. And he begins, at the 7th verse, with rehearsing the gracious dealings of the Lord with Israel, when, in his sovereign mercy, he chose them for his own people, and sought, by his gracious dealings with them, to train them for himself, a willing and an obedient people, "children that would not lie," that "they might be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory in the earth." He dwells on the forbearance and mercy which God exercised towards them, notwithstanding that they rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit, so that it became necessary to "visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes," yet still in mercy and in measure, inasmuch as in the midst of deserved wrath he remembered his covenant, and thought of what he had done for them at the first by the hand of Moses, and so turned away his anger, that he consumed them not. "But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit; therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people," when, in penitence, they said, "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the Shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his Holy Spirit within him? that led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? that led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast," or as the herd, "goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name." The prophet having thus reckoned up the multitude of the Lord's loving-kindnesses towards his people, and his wonderful works on their behalf in the old time, proceeds to make these mercies the ground or plea whereon to rest an earnest, a most importunate, supplication for a renewal of similar mercies to them in their desolate and forsaken state. In the spirit of genuine

humility, he appealed, or rather, I should say, the penitent and believing Jews, in whose name the prophet spoke, appealed not to any thing in themselves, or in their sinning and suffering brethren, but to the grace and mercy of God himself. They pleaded his own forbearance, and compassion, and long-suffering patience, so largely manifested in former times, as a reason why he should again exercise the same pity and forgiveness. They virtually declared that he had taught them, by his great goodness, and his manifold mercies, and the multitude of his loving-kindnesses, and his frequent repentings, when he had thought to visit them with righteous judgment,—they virtually declared that God had thus taught them to expect, that if they called upon him in the time of trouble, he would hear, and help, and deliver them. With great boldness, therefore, but with unfeigned humility and godly sorrow, they appealed to his grace and mercy, whether he would not yet make bare his holy arm, and again visit his forsaken people with the joys of his salvation, even all the blessings of Messiah's spiritual kingdom: "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting." This, of course, as we have all along assumed, is the language of believing Jews,—those who, having seen in Jesus the Messiah promised to the fathers, had discovered that it was not their relation to Abraham, or their descent from Israel, that made them the children of God, but an act of sovereign grace, whereby they were called into the fellowship of the Son of God, and became the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. And such would be the language of every penitent Jew who was awakened to a sense of his guilt, and was brought to understand the way of reconciliation with God. The true Church, then,—the believing Jews,—in whose name the prophet here speaks, prayed for and with the nation, as if they were penitent; but, at the same time, as still conscious of much hardness of heart and waywardness of will: "O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return, for thy servants' sake, the tribes

of thine inheritance. The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while; our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are thine; thou never barest rule over them," —that is, thou didst never stand to the Gentiles in the same peculiar relation as thou didst to Israel, being, in a peculiar sense, their king;—"Thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name."

The prayer of the Church, recorded in the latter part of this chapter, and continued throughout the following, was not heard to the effect of preventing the Jews, as a nation, from being rejected, and, in consequence of their own unbelief, cut off from any participation in the blessings of Messiah's reign. But it was heard notwithstanding, and will one day be answered, moreover, when God shall visit his people, and turn again the captivity of Jacob. Meanwhile, the example of God's true Israel, as here recorded, is full of instruction to the Church in all times. Though we have considered the prediction of judgment, contained in the first verses of the chapter, with a peculiar reference to the rejection of the Jews, at the close of the Old Testament dispensation, and though there is ground to believe that it was specially designed to be so applied, yet the calamity which thus befell that people was still but one example of that righteous retribution with which Christ, in the exercise of his sovereign authority, visits the obstinately impenitent enemies of his Church. It is said of him, as seated on his mediatorial throne, that he rules the nations with a rod of iron, and breaketh them in pieces like a potter's vessel; and the same general truth is announced in the passage before us, though in somewhat different language, and under a different figure. We are taught, therefore, to expect, that where the Saviour's gracious proposals are rejected and despised, or where his cause is opposed and persecuted, he will, from time to time, manifest his sovereignty by the infliction of righteous judgment. Such judgments may not be so appalling as those that overtook the unbelieving Jews of old, and men may not be willing to recognise and acknowledge them as coming from him. There may be secondary causes to which they can be fairly traced; and, of course, ungodly men will look no farther than to these. And believers, I fear, are but too prone to rest satisfied with ascribing to such causes alone, events in which

it is designed that they should recognise and acknowledge the hand of Him who is King of nations as well as King of Zion. Were the operation of second causes a sufficient reason for overlooking the operation of his hand, we might regard even the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews as events with which his power and sovereignty had little to do; for these events might be immediately traced to the unexampled obstinacy of the Jews themselves, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the love of power and conquest on the part of their heathen oppressors. But it was Christ, notwithstanding, who then appeared in power and great glory, vindicating his own supremacy, interposing for the protection and deliverance of his Church, and executing the righteous judgments which he had himself foretold in the days of his flesh, when he beheld Jerusalem, "and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." And so it is still with the calamities which overtake nations, especially the nations to whom the Gospel has been made known, and who have the means and the opportunity of daily reading in their own tongue the wonderful works of God. Whatever be the nature or immediate cause of these calamities,—whether they be such as are altogether beyond the reach of human control, as when famine or pestilence desolates the land,—or whether they are inflicted by the guilty passions of men, breaking loose from all restraint, and seeking gratification in anarchy, spoliation, and bloodshed, —all the causes of public suffering, whether they be immediate or more remote, are mere instruments in the hand of Him who has been exalted to sovereign authority, and are employed to vindicate his supremacy and rectitude.

And what is the duty of God's people at such seasons, and amidst such events? The example of the Church, as recorded in this and the following chapter, is fitted, as I doubt not it was designed, to teach believers of all times what their duty is, when

the judgments of God are abroad in the earth. It teaches them, generally, that such a season ought to be a season of earnest persevering prayer, and so far it will commend itself to the understanding and the heart of every true believer; for prayer is the refuge of every believer in a time of trouble. But the example of the Church in this passage goes much farther than merely to show that such is the duty and the privilege of God's children. It plainly intimates that they ought to identify themselves with the community at large, when suffering under God's afflicting hand, and to feel and pray as if their sins were in part the procuring cause of the divine judgments. They cannot, indeed, and they are not required to say that they have despised the Gospel, and rejected the overtures of divine mercy, and are chargeable with many of the profane and ungodly practices which prevail in the community around them; for if they are conscious that they have been enabled cordially to embrace the Saviour, and that it has become their earnest and honest desire to live to his glory, it were a grievous sin on their part to deny the work of the Spirit on their heart, or to cease acknowledging, with equal humility and gratitude, that, by the grace of God, they are what they are. But while it is true, on the one hand, that their being kept from the ungodliness which prevails around them ought to be the subject of their unfeigned gratitude and praise, it is also true, on the other, that they have much inconsistency, unfaithfulness, and sin to lament, and will be compelled to acknowledge that the abounding iniquity, which ought to have rendered them more watchful over themselves, and more zealous in seeking to advance the cause of truth and godliness, had insensibly, and perhaps largely infected them, leading them to look with less abhorrence on ungodliness, and so rendering them less careful and active to counteract it. They will feel, therefore, that their backsliding and sins do form part of the procuring cause of any calamity that has come upon the community at large; and under this feeling they will confess their sins, and supplicate mercy. And while thus humbled under a sense of their own sins, they will mourn over and confess, as if they were their own, the prevailing iniquities of the time, even those from which through grace they have themselves been preserved.

And they will lament these on two grounds,—first, because

God's great name is thereby dishonoured; and, second, because immortal souls are ruined,—even the souls of those who belong to the same community with themselves, and for whom, therefore, they ought to cherish a special concern. So it was with the Church of old, whose prayer is here recorded. No doubt, the believing Jews of that time had special reason for feeling deeply interested in their unbelieving brethren, inasmuch as, in common with themselves, they had constituted the people of God, —the visible Church,—as distinguished from all other nations; and it might appear to them, therefore, as if the rejection of the Jews nationally were like rendering of no account all the wonderful works which had been done on their behalf, and by which God had formerly glorified his great name. But we, too, are not without similar considerations to deepen our anxiety and quicken our zeal for the maintenance and the spread of the truth in these lands. They have been favoured as few lands have ever been; and our history has recorded many remarkable interpositions for his own cause in the days that are past. This consideration, indeed, does greatly aggravate our guilt when God brings down upon us his righteous judgments. But it furnishes, also, a ground on which God's people are warranted and encouraged, by the example before us, to plead for mercy in the midst of deserved wrath,—even to plead the mercies and loving-kindnesses of the Lord, which have been of old. And though their supplications may not be heard to the effect of immediately removing the visitation of judgment, they may hope that the effect of the judgment may be, that multitudes are persuaded to turn to God in penitence and faith, and that a season of public calamity may be followed by a season of revival and of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

XLII.

THE CHURCH'S PRAYER.

ISAIAH LXIV. 1-12.

THIS chapter is the continuation of a prayer which commences at the 15th verse of the preceding chapter, and which was offered up by the prophet, speaking in the name of the Church. Carried forward, in vision, to the interesting and eventful period when the Old Testament dispensation was to give place to that of the New, he beheld the rejection of Israel as a nation, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews among all nations; and he saw in these events a manifestation of the sovereign power of Messiah, in executing upon the inveterate enemies of his cause the judgments which are figuratively but very solemnly set forth at the beginning of the preceding chapter. This retribution must have appeared a righteous retribution, both to the prophet who foresaw it in vision, and to the people of God who actually witnessed it; for, by that time, Israel as a nation had filled up the measure of their iniquity, in crucifying and slaying the Lord of glory. Still, it must have appeared to both not a little mysterious. Israel had for many ages been the only visible Church of God in the earth; and was, of course, also the home or dwelling-place of the true Church, whose permanence and prosperity were, to all appearance, bound up in the stability of Israel as a nation. When, as a nation, therefore, Israel was rejected, and visited, moreover, with the terrible judgments foretold by the prophet, the believ-

ing remnant,—those who had embraced Jesus as the Messiah promised unto the fathers,—must have regarded that event as a very appalling one, and could hardly fail to be perplexed and troubled for a season as to what would become of the true Church, of which they themselves formed a part. It is their state of mind and feeling, then, while contemplating these calamities, that the prophet here expresses. In their perplexity and distress they look around them for consolation; and, as is usual with the Church in all seasons of trouble, they say, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings." And, accordingly, at the 7th verse of the preceding chapter, they called to remembrance the sovereign goodness of God in having at first chosen Israel as his people; and they recounted the great things which he had done for them, in bringing them out of Egypt, in bearing them, and carrying them all the days of old, enduring with much long-suffering their ingratitude and rebellion, and, at last, bringing them into the resting-place which he had prepared for them, that he might make himself "a glorious name." And having thus rehearsed the mighty acts of the Lord, and his wonderful works towards their fathers in the days of old, they proceeded to make these,—his former loving-kindnesses,—the ground of an earnest prayer, that he would yet have mercy on the people for whom he had already done so much. Whether they desired and expected that Israel might still retain their temporal privileges as a nation, we cannot determine. But it is plain, I think, that they supplicated, on behalf of their rejected people, better than temporal good things,—even an interest in the blessings of Messiah's kingdom, of which they themselves had been made partakers; for they pleaded not their descent from Abraham and relation to Jacob, but God's own sovereign grace, whereby they had been separated from an ungodly world; and they pleaded his gracious interposition, lest, if he rejected those who were once treated as his people, the adversary, who had desolated his sanctuary, might triumph, and speak reproachfully: "The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary; we are thine; thou

never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name."

In the chapter before us, the prayer of the Church,—God's believing people,—is continued, and, if possible, with greater boldness and urgency: "Oh, that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!" It will be recollected, that language similar to this is, on various occasions, employed in Scripture, to set forth any peculiar manifestation of the majesty and mighty power of God, especially when that power is exercised on behalf of the Church. Thus the psalmist, or the Church by the mouth of the psalmist, prays, "Bow thy heavens, O Lord, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. Cast forth lightning, and scatter them; shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them. Send thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children." And we find the revelation which God made of himself to his people in the wilderness thus repeatedly celebrated in sacred song: "Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel." It was, no doubt, to divine interpositions like these that the people of God referred, when they offered up the prayer here recorded; and by the recollection of these they would be encouraged so to pray. And so it is plainly intimated; for they expressly say in the 3rd verse, "When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence." They prayed, therefore, that God would again make a similar manifestation of his divine power on behalf of Israel, and again glorify his great name in the sight of the heathen.

The prayer, of course, might mean that God would deliver Israel from their temporal enemies, as he had often done before, and reinstate them in the enjoyment of all their national privileges. And I do not say that the believing Jews at the com-

mencement of the new dispensation, in whose name the prophet here speaks, did not cherish a lingering hope, that God might still interpose in this way on behalf of their unbelieving brethren, and make them, in their national capacity, witnesses for him against an idolatrous world. But the prayer cannot be confined exclusively to temporal privileges; nor does it necessarily refer to such privileges at all. The sublime language here employed is as applicable to the communication of spiritual blessings, as to any temporal deliverance that was ever wrought for the people of Israel. And, at the very commencement of the New Testament dispensation, there was a manifestation of the majesty and mighty power of God, more glorious than any that the Old Testament Church had ever witnessed. I refer to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended on the apostles, and when, through their instrumentality, in the simple preaching of the Gospel, there were melted into godly sorrow and unfeigned penitence, three thousand stout-hearted, rebellious sinners,—even those who had been accessory to the guilty deed of crucifying the Lord of glory. Then, truly, did the Lord rend the heavens, and come down, and the mountains flowed down at his presence, —even the obdurate hearts of sinners that were hard as the nether mill-stone. And then, too, God made his name known to his adversaries; for then were the impenitent and ungodly filled with terror, and roused to madness against Christ and his cause. And in regard, then, to those who were themselves the subjects of this mighty power of God, even the operation of his Spirit, what could be their desire, and what the subject of their frequent and earnest prayer, but that their brethren, their kinsmen according to the flesh, should be the subjects of the same gracious operation, and made partakers of the good hope to which they had themselves been begotten again? And if they did give utterance to this desire, if they did offer up this prayer, in what other language would they more appropriately express themselves than in that which the Holy Ghost had already so often dictated, whereby to set forth the manifestation of God's mighty power on behalf of his people? In their own conversion to the faith of the Gospel, there was an exercise of that power more glorious, in their apprehension, than any that they had ever witnessed or conceived of; and if all Israel had experienced the

same divine operation, the prayer here recorded would have been answered in all its extent and depth of meaning. It was, in fact, a prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whereby a rebellious people might be turned from sin unto God, and brought into the fold of the good Shepherd whom they had despised and rejected, and, in their blind malignity, had crucified and slain.

It is a prayer, therefore, which it is befitting the Church of all times to offer up. True believers, indeed,—those who have themselves received mercy of the Lord,—cannot but look on the unbelieving multitudes around them with the same feeling of pity that the believing Jews entertained for their disobedient brethren; and if they do not, they must for the time have lost sight of their own privileges, and forgotten their obligations to redeeming grace. They cannot be feelingly alive to the value of the Gospel as the power of God and the wisdom of God unto the salvation of their own souls, without being at the same time deeply concerned for the condition of those who are still strangers to their hope, and destitute of their consolation; and while thus exercised in spirit, they will gladly embrace opportunities of endeavouring to make known to others the precious truth which has brought light and life to themselves. But they cannot have made any such endeavour,—they cannot have seriously set themselves to promote the spiritual good of others,—without discovering their own utter impotence and helplessness in dealing with the hardness of the human heart and the prevailing vices of human society; and how gladly, therefore, should they betake themselves to the refuge here pointed out, and pray, as the Church of old did, that God himself would manifest his mighty power in the subjugation of rebellious sinners! And they are farther and very powerfully encouraged to avail themselves of this privilege, by the consideration that the honour and glory of God are intimately connected with the object of their desire. The Church, whose prayer is here recorded, was fully alive to this consideration; for she supplicated God's gracious interposition on behalf of Israel for this purpose, that he might make his name known to his adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at his presence. And the Church has still abundant reason so to pray. It is well known that avowed unbelievers draw arguments in

support of their infidelity from the fact, that the Gospel has hitherto been but partially propagated among the nations of the earth; and practical unbelievers,—ungodly men generally,—encourage themselves in their ungodliness by the consideration, that multitudes even of those who profess to have embraced the Gospel differ but little from themselves. Thus the name of God is profaned, iniquity abounds, and the wicked triumph. And how should the people of God feel and act in such a state of things? Does it not become them to inquire, whether they have not failed in the part which has been assigned to them in the work of extending the Gospel, and whether, by their inconsistency and coldness, they may not have given occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully? A state of abounding iniquity, —of daring and wide-spread profaneness,—cannot fail to awaken deep and unfeigned sorrow in their minds, and the more so, if they are conscious that they have not done what they might have done to counteract prevailing ungodliness. And when they reflect how the spread of the Gospel among those who know it not, or the extensive revival of real vital godliness among those who profess to know the truth, would awe the ungodly, and put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, how earnestly must they long for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and pray as the Church of old prayed, "Oh, that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, ... to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!"

It is thus that the people of God must be frequently exercised, if they are in a spiritually healthy frame of mind. They have great encouragement, as we have already seen, to be so exercised, and to be earnest and persevering in prayer, that God would make bare his holy arm, and vindicate his cause in the sight of the nations. And they are farther encouraged thus to wait upon God, and to expect that he will do the great things which they ask, by the consideration that he, and he only, has proved himself able to do such great and glorious works: "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee,"—that is, as we find it in the margin, neither hath the eye seen any god beside thee who can do for—can protect and deliver

"him that waiteth for him." Nor is he less willing than he is able thus to interpose on behalf of those who seek him in righteousness, and who remember his ways; for though, for a season, he may be wroth, and may seem to have forgotten his people because they have transgressed, yet his purposes are unchangeable, and he will yet show mercy and save them. "Thou meetest him,"—thou art ready graciously to receive him,—"that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold thou art wroth, for we have sinned; in those is continuance,"—that is, in thy ways or dealings there is permanence or unchangeableness,—"and we shall be saved." The expression seems to be parallel to what is said in the book of Malachi, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." If, therefore, God does at times appear to have forsaken and cast off his people,—if, in the execution of righteous judgment on an ungodly world, he permits his Church to share in the calamity, as if there were no difference between her and the world,—it is because she too has transgressed,—because she has been unfaithful to her high and holy mission as a witness for God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. And so the Church here humbly and unreservedly acknowledges. In the preceding part of this prayer, as we have already seen, the people of God had presented their supplications with remarkable urgency and boldness,—a boldness which may seem to be a striking contrast with the humility and self-abasement expressed in the confession of sin which they are here represented as making.

But it will always be so with believers. At no time will they be more feelingly alive to their own unworthiness, and have a deeper insight into their sinfulness, and be more thoroughly convinced that their salvation is of sovereign grace alone, than at the moment when they enjoy the most unrestrained liberty of access to God, when their heart is enlarged by a sense of his forgiving mercy, and when, in the spirit of adoption, they can draw near to God with confidence as children unto a father. So it was with the Church in whose name the prophet here speaks. Having expressed their confidence in God's unchangeableness as the ground of their hope that he would not forsake or cast them off, they add, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our

righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." They confessed, what every penitent soul must feel and acknowledge, that their own righteousnesses, so far from covering them, were but rags, nay, filthy rags, which served only to make them more loathsome; and that to seek, therefore, to come into God's presence in such a righteousness were daringly to insult his holiness and rectitude, and to incur, in an aggravated degree, shame and everlasting contempt. They acknowledge, too, that their sin was the procuring cause of all that they suffered; that if they had become spiritually barren, ceasing to bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness,—or if, in common with their countrymen, the nation of Israel at large, they had been stripped of their temporal honours and privileges,—it was their sin that had laid them desolate,—it was by their iniquities that they pined away: "We all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." And they confess, moreover, that they had not been careful to watch the first indications of God's displeasure against them, nor forward to supplicate his forbearance and mercy when he gave them intimations of his being ready to forsake them; so that he had withdrawn from them, and left them to reap the bitter fruits of their spiritual sloth: "And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities." In all this the Church,—the true people of God,—were, no doubt, mourning over and confessing the sins of the nation at large, as true believers of all times ought to do. But their own sins also had a place, and we may be assured a prominent place, in all that they lamented and acknowledged; for they were conscious, even the holiest of them, that they had much sin to confess and deplore, and that their sin contributed to the accumulation of guilt, which had brought down the judgment of God for the destruction of his enemies, and the correction of his own people. And being thus awakened to a right apprehension of their unworthiness, they were enabled, in the spirit of true humility, to justify God in all his dealings with them, even the severest. They not only recognised it as a truth,—which would have been a truth whether they admitted it or not,—that they were absolutely in the power

and at the disposal of God; but they acknowledged that he was entitled to do with them, and that it was infinitely right and befitting that he should do with them, whatsoever seemed good to himself. If they were to be delivered from temporal calamity, or to be saved from eternal destruction, they confessed that it could only be, and they were willing that it should be, altogether of sovereign grace,—free, undeserved mercy: "But now, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand."

And did this feeling of helplessness, then, this sense of absolute dependence on God, and of being entirely in his power, indicate any thing like despondency or distrust on the part of God's people? No, it implied the very reverse. That they had been brought into such a state of mind was itself unequivocal evidence of a work of grace on the heart; for it was a state directly opposed to the natural pride of the human heart. That pride may be mortified, and in some measure subdued, in regard to many things; but grace alone will make it yield the point of God's sovereignty. Men may think themselves humble, and may appear to others to be so, in acknowledging their unworthiness and their sins, and in professing to look to mercy for forgiveness; but such humility may be very far from an unreserved and heartfelt acknowledgment of God's absolute sovereignty in the matter of their salvation. Grace alone will ever enable them honestly to say, "We are the clay, and thou our potter." This the Church of old were able to say, and their saying so in truth and sincerity, as they obviously did, was itself a proof that they had received the spirit of grace and supplication, whereby they had returned in penitence and faith to God. And, accordingly, they showed that they had received the spirit of adoption also; for so far from feeling any despondency or distrust as to how God, in his sovereignty, was to deal with them, they address him in the midst of all their humiliation and distress with child-like confidence, saying, "Now, O Lord, thou art our Father." In thus addressing God, they acquiesced in all his past dispensations towards them, not only as just and righteous but as gracious and good,—as the dealings, not of an hard and austere judge, treating them as they deserved to be treated, even with the severity of punishment, but of a gracious father, chastening them for

their profit, that they "might be partakers of his holiness." And in calling God their Father, they did, moreover, express very emphatically their confidence in him for the future,—their assurance that in whatever way, or at whatever time, he might answer their prayers, it could not be otherwise than well-pleasing in his sight that they should desire and pray for the manifestation of his glory in the salvation of sinners,—that they should put him in remembrance of, and plead his own gracious promises regarding the extension of Messiah's kingdom,—and that they should not keep silence, nor give him rest, till he should establish, and "make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

And, accordingly, after making full confession of sin, and acknowledging God's absolute sovereignty in disposing of them as he should see fit, they return to the subject of their prayer with as much of urgency and holy boldness as before. It was, indeed, this very sovereignty of God that constituted the strength of their confidence, and enabled them to come boldly to the throne of grace. Had they been obliged to rely, in any way, or to any extent, on their own righteousness for the acceptance of their persons, and an answer to their prayers, they could have had no confidence at all in approaching God. They must have addressed him with great straitenedness of spirit, nay, with fear and trembling; for the more vividly that they recognised God's presence and purity, the more clearly would they perceive their own impurity, and the utter worthlessness of their very best services. It was, therefore, a great relief to them to be made to feel and brought to acknowledge that all their righteousness,—all that they were naturally inclined to regard as of some account in the matter of their acceptance,—was as filthy rags in the sight of God. It was a great relief to them to be thoroughly convinced of this truth, and made so feelingly alive to it; for it drove them from a refuge which must have failed them,—it compelled them to abandon the vain attempt of finding a plea wherewith to approach God, which they never could have urged with confidence,—and it constrained them to transfer their hope from a foundation where it must have been perpetually disturbed, and must ultimately have perished, to the one only sure foundation, the sovereign grace and mercy of God. On that grace they were taught and enabled exclusively to rely, as the

ground of their plea in their approaches to God; and whatever, therefore, it was lawful or befitting them to pray for, they could pray for it not only without distrust or misgiving, but with holy freedom and boldness, knowing that the grace of God is infinitely larger than their largest desires.

We find them, accordingly, as I have already remarked, returning to the subject of their prayer with renewed confidence, after having made full confession of sin, and acknowledged that their very righteousnesses were loathsome in the sight of God. By that confession they had, as it were, made their escape from those restraints which a self-righteous spirit would have laid upon them in their approaches to God,—the doubts and the misgivings which they must have felt, so long as they laboured to find something in themselves that was to help them at least to a plea, if it did not form the only ground of their plea in coming to the throne of grace. With the plea which God himself had furnished them, when he called them to rely on his grace and mercy, they are very bold: "Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people." And so it must always be with believers. Their freedom in approaching God, and their liberty in pouring out their hearts before him, will always be in proportion to the vividness with which they can realise the righteousness of Christ as the one only ground of their acceptance, to the exclusion of every other ground whatever. There is reason to believe that self-righteousness, in one or other of its various forms, is one of the last restraints from which believers make their escape, and that which continues longest and most frequently to disturb their peace and mar their comfort. It were wise, therefore, frequently to imitate the example of the Church here recorded,—to make their own unworthiness the subject of their serious contemplation,—to seek to be convinced, and to bear in mind, that their very righteousnesses are not only inadequate to cover them, but, when to any extent relied on for that purpose, only render them more vile in the sight of God,—to be thus made to feel that to the sovereign grace of God they must owe their salvation, through the righteousness which he has provided for them,—and then to make these convictions the subject of solemn ac-

knowledgment to God, saying, "We are the clay, and thou our potter." Such a solemn disowning of all personal righteousness, and acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, may, by the grace of God, lead them to a more simple reliance on the Saviour alone; and in proportion as it does so, they will "come boldly unto the throne of grace," to "obtain mercy, and find grace to help them in time of need."

I have said that the Church, or people of God, whose prayer is here recorded, returned to the subject of that prayer, after confession of sin, with all their former boldness. And this is evident from the language which they employed,—language which at first sight might seem to imply something like a claim of merit on their part. "Behold," said they, "see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people." This assuredly was the language of great confidence. But it was any thing but the language of self-righteousness. They were God's people, not because of any thing in themselves, but because God, of his infinite grace and mercy, had called them, and enabled them to rely on his own method of pardoning sinners, of receiving them into favour, and of investing them with the privileges of his children. And, conscious as they were, therefore, that they had been enabled to do so, when they pleaded that they were his people, they pleaded only his own word. They appealed, as it were, to his own faithfulness and truth, whether he would not make good to them the promise wherein he had caused them to trust,—a plea which did most emphatically disown, on their part, all reliance on any thing else than his sovereign grace. It is thus that the greatest confidence towards God is always accompanied with the deepest humility. It was in this spirit that they prayed for themselves, beseeching God that he would not be "wroth very sore," and that he would not "remember iniquity for ever." They prayed, moreover, that the tokens of his anger might be removed,—that he would interpose on behalf of the place which of old he had chosen to put his name there,—the place where their fathers had worshipped, and whither the tribes had gone up, "the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." "Thy holy cities," said they, "are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee,

is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste."

This, it will be remembered, though prophetically uttered by the prophet, was the prayer of the true remnant of Israel, those who saw the termination of the Old Testament dispensation in the destruction of Jerusalem; and it expressed their earnest desire, if not that God would restore all the external glory of the old economy, yet that his ancient people the Jews, as a nation, might participate in the blessings of the new dispensation, and so be, what from the beginning they were intended to be, witnesses for God to all other nations. If this petition should be granted, it would be to them a very unequivocal proof that God was pacified towards them for all that they had done. But if it was not, there might appear to be some ground for doubting whether God had not still a controversy even with his true Church, and whether even she was not to be forsaken. But they had no such doubt. They felt assured, that though Jerusalem and the holy house were laid in ashes, the Church of God could not be overthrown,—that though Israel should not be gathered, yet Messiah would "be glorious in the eyes of the Lord." And this hope, this firm expectation, they did very confidently and emphatically express, when they thus concluded their prayer: "Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?"—as if they had said, Because thou hast seen meet thus to deal with those who were once thy people, and with Mount Zion which was once the dwelling-place of thy glory, wilt thou, therefore, cast off and forsake thy Church? This language is not to be understood as implying that they had any doubt or distrust on the subject. On the contrary, it implied the strongest confidence on their part, that though Israel, as a nation, were cast off, the true Israel would not be forsaken,—believing assuredly that the covenant promise to Messiah would be fulfilled, "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." But the same language does also express very strongly,—what the whole tenor of their prayer plainly intimates,—the deep interest which they

felt in the extension and establishment of Messiah's kingdom. Their supplications for themselves were associated with prayers for the prosperity of the Church ; and, in the anticipation of that prosperity, they found consolation in circumstances fitted to depress and greatly discourage them. So it should be with believers still ; and so it will be, if they are in a right frame of spirit. The honour of the Saviour, in the enlargement of his kingdom, can never be separated in their minds from the enjoyment of their own privileges and hopes ; and though there may be much to discourage them in the reflection that the progress of truth is so slow, yet the recollection of the covenant promise to Messiah, that the kingdoms of the world shall be his, will refresh their spirits, and revive their hope, and give increased earnestness to their prayer, that God will establish and "make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

XLIII.

THE CHURCH'S PRAYER ANSWERED.

ISAIAH LXV. 1-25.

In this chapter Jehovah himself speaks by the mouth of the prophet, and graciously answers the prayer of the Church, contained in the preceding chapters. That prayer, as we have already seen, was offered up by the prophet speaking in the name of the faithful remnant who were to witness the manifestation of Messiah's power in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the rejection of Israel, in their national capacity, from being the people of God. It was a prediction, of course, of what was to take place at the termination of the old dispensation, and the commencement of the new, and a representation of what would be the views and feelings of God's true people at that eventful period. These feelings are expressed in the prayer which the prophet represents them as offering up; and it appears that they fully justified God in all his dealings, acknowledging that their own sins and the sins of their unbelieving countrymen were the procuring cause of the terrible judgment that overtook them. But it appears, also, that there was something mysterious to them in the destruction of the place which God had once chosen to put his name there, making it the habitation of his glory, and in the dispersion of the people whom he had selected to be his own, and among whom, notwithstanding all their backsliding, his true Church was still to be found. It is evident that they had been perplexed with the question,

naturally enough suggested by the events referred to, as to what was to become of the Church, and of the many promises of her extension and prosperity, if Jerusalem and the temple were laid in ruins, and Israel scattered among the nations; and though they felt and expressed unshaken confidence in the power and faithfulness of God, yet they must have felt that it would add largely to their consolation and their confidence too, if it were made more clearly known to them how the promises concerning the Church were to be fulfilled. And God was graciously pleased to reveal even this to them; and this revelation forms the subject of the chapter before us. It begins by announcing, in a single sentence, how it was that the true Church would not only be preserved, but greatly extended, notwithstanding the rejection of the Jews,—namely, by the calling of the Gentiles, whereby the promise made to Abraham would in due time be fulfilled, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name,"—that is, a nation that had never been favoured as Israel had been. But, in contrast with this, it is said of Israel, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people." For this interpretation of the first verse as referring to the Gentiles, and of the second as descriptive of Israel, we have the authority of the apostle, who, in the 10th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, expressly applies the passage in this way; at the same time intimating that the announcement made in these verses must have been very offensive to the prophet's unbelieving countrymen, and that in making it he must have incurred their displeasure, and exposed himself to danger. "But Esaias," says he, "is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."

That the very prediction of the calling of the Gentiles into the Church of God must have been very offensive to the self-righteous and unbelieving Jews, independently of the threatening of their own rejection, is evident from what the apostle himself experienced. On the occasion of his being permitted, by the

chief captain of the Roman guard in Jerusalem, to make his defence to the people, he rehearsed to them the history of his conversion, to which they listened apparently with some degree of patience. The expression in the history is, that they gave him audience. But when he came to relate to them the commission which he received from the Lord Jesus, saying to him, "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem," and "Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles," they "then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." The same spirit of pride against the Gentile nations must, no doubt, have animated Judah and Jerusalem in the time of Isaiah; and he must, therefore, have incurred personal danger in announcing, not only that the Gentiles were to be called to be God's people, but that the Jews were to be rejected, having forfeited the privilege which they had so long enjoyed. But while the prophet thus irritated his countrymen at large, he was speaking words of comfort to the true Church of that and of all future times. He assured the faithful remnant of his own day, that though God did cast off Israel as a nation, yet he would never forget or forsake his Church, nor suffer to fail one of the exceeding great and precious promises which he had given concerning her increase and her prosperity. And he moreover proceeded, still speaking in the name of Jehovah, to give such reasons for the rejection of Israel as must have convinced every true believer that God was not only just, but gracious in his dealings with them,—that nothing but a divine compassion could have so long and so patiently endured their obstinate rebellion,—and that judgment was at last executed only because forbearance could be no longer exercised consistently with the divine rectitude and holiness.

The prophet described Israel as they were in his own time, disobedient and idolatrous, and he also prophetically described them as they had become at the close of the old dispensation, self-righteous and hypocritical. At the former period, they are represented as provoking the Lord to anger continually to his face, sacrificing to idols, and eating abominable things; and at the latter period, trusting in their formal observance of ordinances, and saying, in their pride and self-righteousness, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." Both

were offensive to Jehovah; for it is emphatically said of them, "These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day." It was thus testified concerning Israel by Jehovah himself, that from generation to generation they had been rebellious,—that they had failed to take warning by the correction and chastisements with which their fathers had from time to time been visited,—and that thus they participated in the guilt of their father's transgressions. And this, it will be remembered, was the very charge which our Lord brought against them, when he said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers..... Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." It was thus that the Jews of our Lord's time made the sins of their fathers their own, so that as a nation they had incurred the accumulated guilt of ages; and this is the reason here assigned for their being cast off and dispersed: "Behold, ... I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom, your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the Lord."

It was thus that God was pleased to explain why it was that he rejected Israel; and every true believer must have been convinced that he was just and righteous in his procedure, and that however painful it was to contemplate such a terrible judgment, it was necessary for the vindication of the divine rectitude. But if Israel as a people, for whom so much had been done, had failed at last to be the true Church of God, and, in consequence of unbelief and disobedience, were deprived of their privileges, and disinherited of the possession which they had long held, as God's peculiar people, where, it might still be asked, was a true

Church ever to be found,—at least, a Church so large as Israel would have been if they had remained steadfast in God's covenant? And what, moreover, would become of the promises to the fathers, which seemed to imply that the covenant made with Abraham never could be dissolved? This, as we have already seen, was the question which perplexed the people of God, whose prayer is recorded in the preceding chapter. But from this perplexity God was graciously pleased to deliver them. While he condescended, as we have seen, to justify the severity of his dealings with Israel, in their national capacity,—that is, with the great body of the people, who were ungodly and impenitent,—he vouchsafed also to explain, to those who constituted his true believing people, how the judgment which he inflicted on the Jews, as a nation, was perfectly consistent with his promises to the true Church, and with her enlargement and prosperity, to the full extent of all that had ever been foretold. He assured them that he had not forgotten, and never would forget his promise to them; that he knew them as a good cluster, though it might be small, amidst those that were unripe and unsound,—or, in other words, they were known to him as the faithful remnant of a gainsaying and disobedient people; and that, therefore, he would not destroy them,—he would prove, in their experience, to be the faithful and covenant-keeping God. And if he did thus deal with his true believing people,—if he had thus reserved for himself a remnant who constituted his true Church, and if he secured to them the fulfilment of every good word which his mouth had spoken concerning Israel,—then there was no breach of promise on his part towards the nation at large, even when he cast them off.

From the beginning, threatenings as well as promises had been addressed to Israel, and the severest calamities that ever befell them were nothing more than what they had been solemnly warned of from the first, even by Moses himself. But, besides this, the promises of God in their highest, their spiritual acceptation, were never made to any other than true believers. The blessings which these promises conveyed were, indeed, freely offered to all the descendants of Abraham, and the whole people of Israel were placed in circumstances where every thing was fitted to remind them of these blessings, and to persuade them

to choose them as their portion. But, in all ages, many of the people of Israel, and at times far the greater part of them, despised and rejected these blessings; and these, therefore, never had any lot or portion in the promises made to Abraham, in their highest, their spiritual import. They were long treated, indeed, with great forbearance, and much was done to bring them to repentance. It was needful, also, for the accomplishment of God's purposes regarding the true Church, that Israel, as a nation, should be preserved in the enjoyment of the temporal possession which had been bestowed upon them; and, accordingly, God did endure them with much long-suffering. But when these purposes were accomplished by the coming of Christ, and when even his gracious proposals were despised and rejected, the divine forbearance could no longer be exercised consistently with the divine rectitude; and Israel, having cut themselves off from all share in the spiritual blessings which had been so long and so earnestly urged on their acceptance, were cast off, and disinherited of the temporal possession which was designed to be a type and a pledge of the spiritual portion which was promised to Abraham and his spiritual seed. No promise, then, was broken to Israel. The true believers among them, at the time of Christ's appearing, were admitted to all the privileges and benefits of the new dispensation. Though only a remnant, they were the true Church, just as the true Church, through many successive generations, had formed only a remnant; and as the true Church, they were the heirs, and the only heirs of the promises made to Abraham; and to them these promises, in their true spiritual acceptation, were faithfully fulfilled.

And then, as to the enlargement of the Church, that was not arrested by the rejection of the carnal Israel. On the contrary, it was the enlargement or extension of the Church that rendered their rejection necessary. They despised and rejected Him to whom had been given in covenant "the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." They asserted their exclusive right to all the blessings of Messiah's kingdom; and they deemed it impious towards God, and unjust towards themselves, to suppose that the Gentiles should be admitted to a participation in their privileges. And this they presumptuously laid claim to, at the very moment that

they deliberately rejected Messiah himself,—nay, crucified and slew the Lord of glory. They insisted on the old dispensation being preserved and perpetuated, even though they had forfeited all the blessings and privileges which it was designed to impart. And if that dispensation had been perpetuated,—even though the Jews, as a nation, had universally been found faithful and steadfast in God's covenant,—how could the Church have been extended? The Mosaic economy made no such provision as has been made under the new dispensation for spreading abroad the true religion among the nations. The Jews, indeed, were permitted and required to receive Gentile proselytes who should voluntarily seek to be admitted into the Church; and many such were at different periods received. But they had no instructions, and, from the nature of the dispensation, they had no power, to transfer to other nations the system of religious worship and ordinances which they themselves enjoyed in Jerusalem. A new dispensation was necessary to provide for the enlargement of the Church,—even for the ingathering into it of all the nations of the earth. The introduction of this dispensation was resisted by the Jews to their own ruin, but not to the defeat of God's gracious counsel; and Jehovah himself here condescended to assure his faithful remnant, that though Israel, as a nation, were disinherited, and their land laid desolate, yet the true Church should be unspeakably more numerous than it had ever before been. Nor was it to be a new Church. It was the Church which had existed from the time of Abel, though at times reduced to great weakness, and especially at the time that Christ appeared, when the faithful remnant of Israel was smaller, perhaps, than it ever had been at any former period. Still, this small remnant was the same Church which had continued from the beginning, and was to be perpetuated under a new dispensation, wherein provision was made for its enlargement, so as to embrace innumerable multitudes "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." And this assurance of the enlargement and prosperity of the Church under the new dispensation is expressed in language which was peculiarly emphatic, as addressed to the believing Jews who constituted the true Church at the critical period of the termination of the old, and the commencement of the new dispensation. It is

represented as the full re-occupation of the land of Canaan by the Church, from Achor on the east, to Sharon on the west. The selection of these two places to indicate the whole land is very significant. Sharon has always been known as distinguished for its rich fertility; the promised possession of it as a fold of flocks implied the peaceful and happy state of those who possessed it. And the allusion to the valley of Achor, or, as the word means, "the valley of trouble," is still more striking. It was there that Achan, by taking of the accursed thing, troubled the camp of Israel, and caused them for a season to be deprived of the protection of Jehovah, at their very entrance on the possession of Canaan; and it was on this account that it was called Achor. But it is here foretold, as a proof of the peace and prosperity of the Church under the new dispensation, that what to the Old Testament Church was the valley of trouble, would be a quiet resting-place for the herds: "And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there. And Sharon shall be a field of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me;" or, as it is expressed by Hosea, "I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

Such was the explanation which God condescended to give to his Church of his otherwise alarming and perplexing procedure, in the rejection of the carnal Israel as a nation from the place and the privileges which they had so long enjoyed. This gracious communication must have ministered largely to the consolation of the true Church in Isaiah's time, amidst the many indications of growing degeneracy in the men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, which did but too certainly announce the coming judgments of God. But still more consoling must it have been to the faithful remnant who formed the true Church at the time when the old dispensation was about to give place to the new. And that it did so is testified by Simeon, who, on seeing the child Jesus brought into the temple, gave thanks that he had been permitted to behold Him in whom was to be fulfilled the promise recorded here, as well as in many other passages of

the prophet's writings: "Then took he Jesus up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." The verses, then, which we have now been considering, were addressed to the true Israel for their encouragement and consolation; and the assurance which they contain is fitted to revive the hope and strengthen the faith of the Church in all times. But in the 11th and four following verses, Jehovah addresses the carnal Israel in the language of solemn warning, contrasting the misery and ruin which would assuredly overtake them, with the security, peace, and blessedness which were to be the portion of the true Church. In the charge brought against them, special mention is made of their idolatry, which was the prevailing sin of the nation in Isaiah's time; and they are accused, also, of turning a deaf ear to the many gracious invitations and reproofs which had been addressed to them, for the purpose of turning them from their idols: "Because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit." And this general threatening is followed up by one more particular, and especially deserving of notice: "And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name."

This is not the first occasion on which we find it foretold of the true Church, in this same book, that they were to receive another name. In the 62d chapter, it is said to Zion, "Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name;" and, taken in connection with the rest of the chapter, the expression is obviously to be understood, I think, as meaning a new state or condition into which the Church was to be brought,—a state of clearer light, of richer privileges, and

of higher attainments in holiness. Such, also, I conceive, is the import of the expression before us, "The Lord God shall . . . call his servants by another name,"—that is, they shall enjoy in richer abundance than before all the blessings and privileges which distinguish the people of God from a world lying in sin.

But something more seems to be implied by the expression, being called "by another name," as it is here employed. It is connected with a very remarkable declaration in the first clause of the verse, "And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name." Commentators have supposed, and, I think, on good grounds, that the words refer "to the substitution of the Christian name for that of Jew, as a distinctive designation of God's people." It will be recollected that one of the judgments which Moses was commanded to denounce against Israel, in the event of their refusing to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God, was, that they should "become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord should lead" them; and this is, in substance, what is here foretold. And the prediction has been fulfilled. It is now a matter of history, as has been observed in reference to this very passage, that the Jewish commonwealth, or nation, has been destroyed,—that the name of Jew has been for centuries a byword and a form of execration and cursing; while they who have inherited the spiritual privileges which the Jews despised, and forfeited, and lost, are now called by another name altogether, namely, Christians,—a name which, in the ordinary language of the professing Church, stands opposed to that of Jews, and a name, moreover, which true believers could not possibly receive till after Christ came. It is this change of name, therefore, which the Church has undergone, that seems obviously referred to in the 15th verse. And this view of the subject is confirmed by the next verse, where it is said that the result of this change of name is, "That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth,"—that is, the name of God and of his Church would be so identified, that he who blessed or sware by the one would bless or swear by the other. And this is true of the New Testament Church, whose

name, Christian, is identified with the name, Christ. Moreover, the expression, "God of truth," is literally "God Amen;" and it will be recollected that this is the name or title repeatedly given to Christ in the New Testament. In the first chapter of Revelation, the Saviour says of himself, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen." And in the third chapter of the same book, it is said of Christ, "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness." The prediction, then, that the people of God should receive another or a new name has been fulfilled, not only in their being now placed under a better dispensation, enjoying clearer light and higher privileges, but literally also in their name being actually changed. And the change is full of instruction. The very name which they bear is fitted continually to remind them how it was that the Jews forfeited and lost the privileges which Christians now enjoy, and to enforce the apostle's admonition, "Be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee." And, moreover, the name Christian suggests to all who bear it the solemn question, whether they do really participate in the spiritual blessings, and truly possess the character which the word Christian implies; or whether the mere name is all that they can lay claim to. It is easy to assume the name, and not very difficult to establish their claim to it in the estimation of the world. But does God admit their claim? It is said of the Church in the 62d chapter, "Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." The question then is, Do we bear the Christian name with this sanction? Do we assume it, because we have embraced Christ, and are one with him, so that we are not only entitled to be called Christians in the judgment of our fellow-men, but are graciously recognised as such by him who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins? It was a very solemn message that was sent to the angel of the Church in Sardis, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

After the solemn warning thus addressed to the carnal Israel, and which is applicable also to mere nominal Christians, the subject of the enlargement and prosperity of the true Church is again resumed at the 17th verse, and is continued to the close of

the chapter. The new dispensation, under which that enlargement was to take place, is set forth under the figure of a new creation. "For, behold," saith Jehovah, "I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." The nature of this new creation is explained, in the next two verses, to be of a moral and spiritual kind, consisting in the exaltation of the Church to higher privileges, and higher attainments in holiness: "But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying." It has been observed of this passage, that "there is something very beautiful in the association of ideas here expressed. God shall rejoice in his people, and they shall rejoice with him. They shall no longer know what grief is, because he shall cease to grieve over them; their former distresses shall be forgotten by them, and for ever hidden from his eyes." This happy change in the state of the true Church is farther illustrated, as is usual in the writings of the prophets, by representing it as the enjoyment of great temporal blessings, especially of the two blessings of worldly prosperity and long life,—the blessings by which, under the Old Testament dispensation, God was wont to manifest his favour towards his people: "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but," in contrast with this, "the sinner," —he who belongs not to the Church or people of God,—"the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." And with this long life they shall enjoy prosperity, security, and peace: "They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble: for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them."

These promises were originally addressed to the Old Testament Church, and the blessings promised were such as the people of God were familiar with, as tokens or expressions of his favour

and loving-kindness. They did, therefore, very significantly represent the richer and better blessings of the new dispensation. And that the promise of these temporal blessings is to be understood, not in its literal acceptation, but in a spiritual sense, is farther evident from the concluding verses of the chapter, where speedy answer to prayer, and the limitation of Satan's power, are expressly promised, as privileges peculiar to the new state into which the Church was to be brought: "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat." It will be recollected that by the curse pronounced upon the serpent, because of the part which it had in the seduction of man into sin, it was doomed to degradation by the sentence, "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." This, of course, was an intimation of the ruin which was ultimately to overtake Satan and his kingdom; for it was added, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." When it is here said, therefore, "Dust shall be the serpent's meat," we cannot suppose that nothing more was meant than merely to repeat the original curse, which had never been withdrawn or modified. It plainly implies, that in the new state into which the Church was to be brought, the infliction of the curse pronounced on the serpent was to be rendered more palpable, or, in other words, the serpent's head was to be crushed,—the power of Satan was to be resisted and restrained, as it had never been before: "Dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord."

We have not yet seen the full accomplishment of this promise. But we have seen the fulfilment of it to a very large extent; and we have seen also in the new dispensation, which is emphatically the dispensation of the Spirit, ample provision made for realising to its full extent all that is here foretold. The infliction of the curse upon the serpent,—the bruising of his head,—was very palpably manifested in the Saviour's miracles, and especially in his death, when he "spoiled principalities and powers," and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross. Then

was fulfilled the Saviour's declaration, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." And so it was under the ministry of the apostles, when, through their instrumentality, countless multitudes of idolatrous Gentiles, the bond-slaves of the wicked one, were translated into the light and liberty of the sons of God, and Christian churches were established in many countries and cities where Satan had his seat. And since apostolic times, much has been done to carry the prediction before us into effect, even notwithstanding the defections and backslidings of the Church. In our own times we are witnessing the progress of the promise towards its final fulfilment; for in every successful missionary effort, we behold a breach made in the bulwarks and strongholds of Satan, and in every one of these we have a new pledge that his kingdom will be destroyed. And then with respect to the great and glorious change here set forth under the figure of new heavens and a new earth, we see ample provision made by the Gospel dispensation for bringing it about, however far it may yet be from being realised. The apostle has said of all who are converted to the faith of the gospel, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," or there is a new creation; "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." If the Gospel, then, were universally or generally believed, if society consisted entirely or mainly of truly converted persons,—persons who are in Christ, and have therefore become new creatures,—should we not see realised all that is here foretold? And why should we doubt that it will one day be so? The same power that has already converted multitudes in every successive generation, through many centuries, is surely able to convert others, and that, too, by the same means, namely, the simple preaching of the Gospel. And does not the Saviour's command to go and preach that Gospel "to every creature" under heaven, carry with it an assurance that thereby he is to subdue the world unto himself? But if we would really believe and rejoice in this promise, and earnestly long and labour for its fulfilment, we must see to it that we are ourselves in Christ, and have become new creatures,—that we have personally undergone that great change which the Scriptures set forth, in such strong and varied language, as a new creation,—being born again,—passing from death into life,—being turned from darkness to light, and from

the power of Satan unto God. If we have not ourselves been converted, we can have no deep or heartfelt interest in the conversion of others. And, on the other hand, the more we experience of the peace and good hope of the Gospel, the more will we be inclined, not only to long for, but to expect the conversion of others; for when we reflect what must have been the power that was necessary for subduing our rebellious hearts, and turning our alienated affections to God, we cannot despair of the conversion of any to whom the Gospel may be proclaimed.

We have, moreover, in the passage before us, great encouragement earnestly to long and pray for the success of a preached Gospel, inasmuch as one of the blessings promised under the new dispensation is God's gracious readiness to hear the prayers of his people: "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." This is, no doubt, a very precious promise to believers in regard to their own personal concerns, and fitted to give them great confidence in coming to God for every thing that they need. But, from the connection in which it is introduced, it seems especially to refer to prayers offered up for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. And, in this view of the promise, we find a very beautiful and encouraging example of its fulfilment, even under the Old Testament dispensation. I refer to the case of Daniel, when he set his face "unto the Lord God, to seek, by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes," for the restoration of his captive people. "Whiles I was speaking," he says, "and praying, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, . . . being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation, . . . and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, . . . at the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee."

XLIV.

GOD'S TEMPLE, THE HEARTS OF HIS PEOPLE.

ISAIAH LXVI. 1, 2.

THE precious promise contained in the passage under consideration, like those recorded in the preceding chapter, was designed, in the first instance, to comfort the true Israel of Isaiah's own day, and especially the faithful remnant of the Jews who were to witness the termination of the old, and the commencement of the new dispensation. At that eventful period, the carnal Israel, that is, the unbelieving Jews who constituted the nation, were to be cast off,—Jerusalem was to be trodden down of the Gentiles,—and the temple was to be destroyed. It appears, from the conclusion of the 64th chapter, where the prophet speaks in the name of the believing Jews who were to witness these events, that they were to be greatly perplexed thereby, not being able clearly to see how, after such desolating calamities, the true Church was to be preserved and extended. They are represented as saying, "Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste." To clear away their perplexity, and thereby to strengthen their faith and revive their hope, the prophet was commissioned to address them in the name of Jehovah in answer to their prayer,—showing them, on the one hand, that the rejection of the carnal Israel was necessary for the vindication of the divine rectitude and truth,

being nothing more than had from the beginning been solemnly threatened, both against the temple and against the nation, in the event of Israel refusing to listen to the voice of the Lord their God; and assuring them, on the other hand, that notwithstanding the rejection of the great body of their countrymen, provision would be made, under the new dispensation, not only for enlarging the true Church far beyond her former limits, but for exalting her to a state which, in respect of privileges and spiritual attainments, she had never before reached.

This gracious communication forms the subject of the preceding chapter; and then, in the passage before us, the prophet, still speaking in the name of Jehovah, proceeds to speak of the temple,—that gorgeous fabric, which was not only an object of idolatrous admiration to the carnal Jews, and which became more so just in proportion as they became more carnal, but was regarded, even by the most godly and devout among the Jews of our Lord's time and of apostolic times, with a profound and affectionate reverence, which it is impossible for us fully to estimate. We can easily conceive, however, that the destruction of that sacred edifice must have been a very mysterious event, even to the believing Jews, at the commencement of the New Testament dispensation. It was the place where God had for ages sat enthroned, sending forth the rays of his glory on the nations around. It was there that the blood of atonement had flowed from generation to generation, imparting from year to year peace to the consciences of penitent worshippers. And in the neighbourhood thereof, the great atonement had been made, of which all the other sacrifices had been but types,—and made by Him who had been wont to honour and grace the temple by his presence, and to manifest a holy and righteous indignation against the profaneness of those who had converted his Father's house,—the house of prayer,—into a house of merchandise, a den of thieves. With what other feelings, then, than of profound regret, could the faithful remnant see the utter overthrow and ruin of a place which had so long been sanctified, and which they had been taught to regard as essential for maintaining a visible and permanent testimony for the true and living God against an idolatrous world,—a centre from which light and life might flow forth upon the nations sunk in darkness and spi-

ritual death? In great condescension, therefore, and in great kindness, Jehovah addresses them, in the passage before us, for the purpose of reconciling them to the final removal and loss of the temple; and he does so by putting it to them, whether they could suppose that such a fabric was necessary for asserting the supremacy or manifesting the glory of Him who had heaven for his throne, and the earth for his footstool.

The appeal was rendered peculiarly emphatic, too, by the representation which is given of the new or Gospel dispensation in the preceding chapter, where it is set forth under the figure of new heavens and a new earth,—an earth over which the glory of God was to be diffused in the conversion of sinners "out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,"—so that it would no longer be necessary that there should be a favoured spot which he should choose to put his name there, and which he should, in a special manner, make the dwelling-place of his glory. And this, I think, was the view which the martyr Stephen entertained of the passage before us. It will be recollected that the accusation brought against him, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, was, that he had said, "that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." What he had said to furnish a ground for this charge, we are not told. But we are told of him that he was "full of faith and power," and that his enemies "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." And it appears, moreover, that though Jerusalem and the temple were still standing, he had a clear apprehension that neither of them was necessary for the glory of the new dispensation, nay, that the removal of them was necessary for the full manifestation of that glory; and this he avowed openly in his defence before the council, by referring to the declaration in the passage under consideration, whereby he was held to have confessed the charge brought against him, of speaking "blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law." "Howbeit," said he, "the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?"

It thus appears that Stephen not only clearly understood and

was perfectly reconciled to the removal of the temple, as no longer necessary for the glory of the new dispensation, but earnestly sought to wean his unbelieving countrymen from their idolatrous, and, therefore, vain and ruinous attachment to mere outward rites, especially now that the one great sacrifice had been made. He saw that they were in the lamentable state described by the prophet in the passage immediately following the verses before us,—a state in which their services were an abomination in the sight of the Lord : " He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood ; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol." We cannot doubt, then, that the faithful remnant of the Jews, in common with Stephen, found much to comfort them in the words of the prophet, and much to reconcile them to the removal of the temple, with all its decorations and services. But while God was thus graciously pleased, by the mouth of his prophet, to provide, in an especial manner, for the consolation of his believing people, in circumstances of peculiar trial to their faith, he has recorded a declaration which will be found rich in meaning, and inexhaustible in consolation to his people in every age. It speaks, indeed, the language of rebuke as well as of encouragement. It did so to the unbelieving Jews at the commencement of the new dispensation. They rejected, yea, crucified and slew Him who was the antitype of the temple, the tabernacle that God pitched, and not man, and in whom was fulfilled all that the sacrifices and ordinances of the temple had typified or shadowed forth. But at the very time that they did so, they were more eagerly engaged in labouring to adorn and beautify the temple, and manifested more of a spirit of self-righteousness, in relying for acceptance with God on the observance of mere external rites, many of them of their own devising, than perhaps at any former period. And though they were, therefore, beyond the reach of instruction,—though their conscience was seared against the entrance of reproof; yet how sharp was the rebuke which was addressed to them, and how terrible the threatening which it implied, when they read the words of the prophet: " Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me ? and

where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord!" And so it speaks the language of severe rebuke to hypocrites and formalists still,—to all who rest satisfied with professing Christ with their mouth, while they have not received him into their heart,—who look for acceptance in external ordinances, but have never worshipped in spirit and in truth; for wherein do they differ in principle and real character from the Jews of old, both offering an unmeaning and heartless service to the great God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Sovereign, Lawgiver, and Judge, the holy and heart-searching God?

But while the passage before us was at first designed to rebuke the carnal Israel of old, and still stands recorded to reprove and warn formalists of all times, yet it was mainly designed, I think, as it is eminently fitted, to minister consolation and encouragement to God's people. It did so to the faithful remnant at the beginning of the Gospel dispensation. It reconciled them to the destruction of the temple, and the final removal of all its ordinances,—an event which even the holiest and most enlightened among them could hardly have contemplated without some feeling, not of regret only, but of fear and perplexity. And it did so by assuring them, that though they were no longer to enjoy the privilege of approaching God in the house which he had once made the dwelling-place of his glory, yet they would find that God was still near them,—that though he was to forsake the place in which he did, at one time, in very deed dwell with men on the earth, yet he would still really dwell with them who were his own people,—that, in a word, he was to exchange one material temple for innumerable spiritual temples, even the souls of his believing people, temples more in accordance with his own spiritual, glorious nature than that at Jerusalem, or even the material heavens themselves, where is placed the throne of his glory: "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

This, then, is the subject-matter of the passage under consi-

deration, namely, that by the more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit under the New Testament dispensation, the one material temple of the old dispensation was to be exchanged for innumerable living spiritual temples, even the souls of all true believers in Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles: "To this man," —that is, to every man,—"will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." The question then naturally occurs, What is the import of the expression, "To this man will I look?"—what is meant by God looking to a man, as the words are here employed? But before proceeding to this inquiry, it may not be unprofitable to consider who are they to whom God thus promises that he will look? They may be described, indeed, in a single expression. They are true believers, as I have already remarked,—those who individually are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and collectively form the true Church, the spiritual Zion, where God delights to dwell. But more than one expression is here employed to describe them. Three characteristic marks are given of them, whereby they are distinguished from other men; and the consideration of these may help us, as I doubt not it was designed to do, in trying ourselves, and in determining whether we have any good ground to believe that we belong to the class here described, and have an interest in the precious promise recorded in the passage before us. And, first, they are "poor." I need hardly remark that this expression does not refer to their temporal circumstances, as poor in regard to this world's goods. It is obviously equivalent to the expression used by the Saviour when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The connection in which it is introduced plainly shows that such is its meaning here, as it is in various other passages. Indeed, there is no one word, perhaps, more frequently employed in Scripture than the word poor, to characterise the people of God; and when so used, it must of course be understood as meaning poor in spirit. And that meaning is very obvious. It implies that the poor in spirit feel themselves to be what God in his word says that all the fallen children of Adam are. They are all, he says, guilty,—not only liable to condemnation, but actually condemned,—not only destitute of righteousness, but rendered more loathsome by the very righteousness which they lay

claim to; and, moreover, that they have not the capacity of enjoying what is truly good,—that they have a lust, a morbid appetite, for what, even when enjoyed, will only make them more miserable,—that they have no taste, no relish for what is spiritual and holy,—that they are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them,—that they are dead in trespasses and sins.

This is God's account of men in their fallen and unregenerate state; and the account or description may be summed up in one word,—all men are sinners. And when so summed up, there are few who will not in words acknowledge its truth. All will confess that they are sinners. But what do they mean by the confession? Something very far short, indeed, I fear, of what that word means in Scripture. That they have sinned, they cannot, and, therefore, they do not attempt to deny. But so have all other men as well as they; and this consideration is secretly felt by them as a great palliation of their guilt. And that guilt is, in their mind, though they would not perhaps avow it, still farther palliated by the consideration that many others are far greater sinners than they; and thus they come to feel, though they would not say so in words, as if they had not much to lament, and not much to fear, in being sinners. They do not really feel it to be true, and they are not prepared to admit from the heart, that it would be just, and reasonable, and right, if it were true, that judgment has come upon them to condemnation,—that the wrath of God is on them,—and that it must abide on them for ever, unless they are united by a living faith to Him who endured that wrath on behalf of them that believe on him, and "redeemed them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them."

Now, the poor, as they are here denominated, believe all this. They believe that their character and condition are such as God in his Word has declared them to be. They feel that it were vain,—and as foolish and sinful as it is vain,—to attempt qualifying or explaining away the statements of divine truth respecting their guiltiness and sin in the sight of God. These statements are very strong, and such as at one time they would willingly have thought not true. But they have been convinced that God only can adequately estimate the nature of sin and

the character of sinners, and that there can be no exaggeration in the language in which these are described by the God of truth. On the same ground, they believe that nothing is said in Scripture of the evil and demerit of sin, and of the judgment which sinners have incurred, but what is just and true. They are convinced that God would not deal otherwise with sin than he has done, in declaring it to be deserving of his righteous displeasure, his wrath, and curse; and, moreover, that he could not but visit sin with the actual infliction of this curse. In all this they justify God. They acknowledge that in this he is righteous, as he is in all his ways, and holy, as in all his works. They disown in their heart, as well as with their lips, all pretensions to any righteousness. They feel that any comparison of themselves with others is idle and useless, as well as a virtual denial of the rectitude of the sentence whereby judgment has come upon all men to condemnation. They desire to see and judge themselves as God sees and judges them, feeling and acknowledging that they have, and can have no hope but in his sovereign grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. And with these views and feelings their language is, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

But it is farther said of those to whom the promise in the 2d verse belongs, that they are "of a contrite spirit." The expression "a contrite," or broken "spirit," repeatedly occurs in Scripture, and is characteristic of true penitents,—of those who are duly affected with a sense of sin, and who sorrow for it after a godly sort. And it is evident that it is the poor only, as that word is here used, that can do so. They who are unwilling to believe, and who do not really believe, that sin is the evil and offensive thing in the sight of God which he declares it to be, and that the state and character of sinners are what the Scriptures represent them, cannot have a truly contrite spirit. They may have much reason to regret particular sins with which they have been chargeable, because of the bitter fruits, of a worldly nature, which these sins have brought forth; and they may, with perfect sincerity, lament these, and most earnestly wish that they had never committed them. But all this sorrow for sin may

have no reference to God at all. It may be a mere feeling of self-condemnation for the folly of doing what has been followed with bitter consequences, of a temporal kind, while the sin itself, apart from its consequences, has never been really felt and deplored. Nay, there may be more than this,—I mean, there may be something more like true sorrow for sin than what I have now adverted to,—but which still comes far short of true contrition and broken-heartedness. The recollection of certain sins more heinous in themselves, or more aggravated by the circumstances in which they were committed, than others that they have been guilty of, may disturb and distract them in the prospect of death and eternity. Their conscience may be awakened by the thought of these sins, brought to their recollection, it not to be, by the Word of God which they read or hear, or by some affecting dispensation of Providence. And while the painful remembrance of these presses heavily on their mind, they may be constrained to acknowledge before God, in secret, that they are guilty, and deserve punishment, and also to cry loudly for mercy. But, with all this, there may be a secret lurking feeling in their minds, that but for these more aggravated transgressions, they would have had little to fear,—that, excepting these, there was nothing in the general course of their life and character to have laid any heavy burden on their conscience,—and that, if these were forgiven, they would be easy and hopeful. I fear that this is but too true and faithful a representation of the spiritual state of many. And if so, then what is their true state? It is just this, that they have no right apprehension of sin, nor of their own condition as sinners in the sight of God, according to the Scripture view of these subjects; and that all the regret, or sorrow, or remorse which they feel, arises not from a true sense and hatred of sin, but from the dread of the punishment which may be awarded to it, and which they secretly believe to be so arbitrary, and so little connected with eternal and unchangeable principles, as that God may, out of mere pity, relax or remit it.

Now, the contrite in heart are not insensible to the consequences of sin. To them, the wrath of God is a very terrible thing,—far more terrible than those I have been speaking of can conceive it to be; because the contrite in heart see and

understand that the wrath of God is not a thing of feeling or passion, which may be modified or suppressed by another feeling, as that of compassion; but the calm, and holy, and righteous execution of just and deserved punishment, and which can be remitted only to those for whom Christ endured it all, even to the very uttermost, without any mitigation, when Jehovah laid on him the iniquities of all his people, and when he bare these iniquities in his own body on the tree. To the contrite in heart, the wrath of God is a very awful thing, not to be averted, as too many think, by a mere cry for mercy. They believe that if it be averted from them, it is only because it was inflicted on Christ as their surety and representative. But though they are far more tender than others can be to the fearful looking for of judgment which is due to sin, this is not the only ground on which they lament their sinfulness. They mourn over their transgressions as rebellion against the authority of God, and as dishonouring to his holy and righteous law. They are filled with sorrow and shame when they think of their ingratitude to their Creator, in whom they live, and move, and have their being; and to their unwearied Benefactor, who has all their life long loaded them with benefits, which, so far from awakening feelings of thankfulness, often served only to shut him altogether out of their hearts. But, above all, they mourn and are in bitterness when they look on Him whom they have pierced,—when they reflect how insensible they once were to the compassion and love of the Saviour,—how unwilling they were to hear, and seriously to entertain the gracious invitations whereby he sought to win their confidence and love,—how they preferred having their thoughts occupied with the veriest vanity, to the contemplation of the wonders of redeeming love,—and how cold their affections still are, even now that they have been taught in some measure to appreciate the divine excellence of the Redeemer's character, and the obligation under which he has laid them. They thus mourn over sin because it is hateful to God, and has rendered them vile in his sight,—because it has debased their nature, and unfitted them for the enjoyment of fellowship with God,—because it has made them "wretched, and miserable," as well as "poor, and blind, and naked."

A third characteristic of those to whom the promise is ad-

dressed is, that they tremble at God's word. And if they have been brought into the state already described,—if they have been convinced that they are as guilty and helpless as the Scriptures declare that they are,—and if their hearts have been, in some measure, affected by a right sense of their sin,—then assuredly there is much in the word of God at which they may and will tremble. The law of God, which, as their conscience testifies, is holy, righteous, reasonable, and good, speaks only of wrath when it speaks of sin; and when men, therefore, are convinced of sin, and believe, moreover, that the law is unchangeably just, it will be impossible for them to hear, without fear and dread, the sentence which it pronounces, and the threatenings which it gives forth. These threatenings, indeed, will sometimes be found to awaken and alarm the conscience even of those who have not been convinced of the reasonableness of the law's requirements, or of the rectitude of its sentence, but who, on the contrary, have a secret feeling that it is unreasonably severe and unnecessarily rigorous. With such, of course, it is a slavish fear which it awakens, though it may be, and, I doubt not, frequently is the first step towards their acceptance of Christ, and their entire acquiescence in the truth, that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." But even where there is hope through grace, and where men have been delivered from the slavish terror of the punishment which the law denounces against the workers of iniquity, there will be a holy awe awakened by what the word of God says is due to sin, and what, moreover, it declares must be inflicted on account of sin. Even though they have a well-grounded hope that they have found a refuge from the wrath to come, yet they will feel that it becomes them to tremble when they think what it is they have made their escape from, and, above all, when they reflect how they have escaped, even by the sufferings and death of Him who took upon himself the endurance of the penalty which they had incurred,—suffering the just for the unjust, bearing their sins in his own body on the tree. But neither is this feeling the only one that is implied in the expression, trembling at God's word. It implies profound reverence for all that the word contains, whether threatening or promises. Those who tremble at the word of God are they who bow in lowly submission to its au-

thority as paramount to every thing else,—who are zealous for its honour, not only reverencing it themselves, but anxious that it should be reverenced by others,—who are feelingly alive to the danger of misunderstanding it, to the dishonour of God, and their own spiritual injury,—and who are jealous of any attempt to explain away or qualify its plain declarations, so as to render them more compatible with some current maxim, or more indulgent to some prevailing practice. To be tremblingly alive to this most dangerous snare is, I think, what is very specially meant by the expression in the passage under consideration, trembling at God's word. It was thus that the psalmist felt when he said, "It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way."

Such is a short exposition of what appears to me to be the import of the three characteristics of those of whom the passage under consideration speaks, and of whom it says that they are "poor," that they are "of a contrite spirit," and that they tremble at God's word. And I need hardly say,—I am sure I need not say it to those to whom the description applies,—that those who have been brought into the condition which I have endeavoured to describe, have had, in their progress towards it, and may still have, even now that they have reached it, much to depress and to discourage them. It must have been so with them at the first, when they discovered and felt it to be a truth, a great reality, that they were guilty and condemned,—that the sentence of condemnation was a just sentence,—and that they had nothing to plead in arrest of judgment. It must have been so with them at the second stage of their progress, when they began to feel not only that they were justly condemned, but that sin had rendered them unfit, as well as unworthy, to enjoy fellowship with God,—and that a divine power alone could quicken them to the capacity of finding their chief happiness in God, as their satisfying and eternal portion. And it must be so with them still, when they think how prone they are to depart away from God,—how far short they come of the requirements of his law, which should be to them not only a rule of life, but a law of love,—a commandment in the very keeping

of which they should find a great reward. At whatever stage or period of their progress they may be, they must feel that they stand greatly in need of consolation and encouragement,—consolation under a sense of guiltiness and sin, imparting to them a sense of forgiveness, and encouragement in their conflict with the power of sin, so that they may have the good hope of a final victory. And this is what the promise in the passage is designed and fitted to give them: "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

Whatever may be the precise meaning of looking to such a man, there is enough in the very connection in which the words are introduced to show that they mean something very gracious and very kind. They plainly imply that God looks with more complacency on those whom he here describes, than he did upon the temple of old on Mount Zion, or on the material heavens where the throne of his sovereignty is fixed. We cannot suppose that the language of the passage was designed to lower, in the estimation of men, the heavens which declare God's glory, and the firmament which showeth forth his handywork; and still less, that it was designed to represent as a little or contemptible thing,—a thing unworthy of God's notice or regard,—the house which was originally built by his own gracious permission, and the pattern of which was given by himself to David his servant. On that house God did look with great complacency, as David declared in the 132d Psalm; for though Zion there spoken of was mainly designed to be understood spiritually, as denoting the true Church of God, yet the whole tenor of the Old Testament Scriptures shows that the material Zion, with the temple which was built there, was, as a type of the Church, referred to when it was said, "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." But in the passage before us, God says, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been,"—or all these things were, that is, came into being at my bidding; "but to this man will I look,"—that is, above all these things,

glorious as they are,—"to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

What, then, is meant by the Lord's looking to such a man? The general import of the expression I have already stated, as meaning that instead of the one material temple on Mount Zion, which was the distinguishing feature in the Old Testament dispensation, God was to have, under the New Testament dispensation, innumerable living temples, even the souls of his believing people, with whom he was to dwell, even as he dwelt in Jerusalem of old. All this is expressly said in a preceding chapter,—the 57th, verse 15,—where God speaks of the same class of persons that are spoken of here: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." The same most precious truth is repeatedly stated, and in more definite terms, in the New Testament, as descriptive of the higher privileges and richer blessings of the Gospel dispensation. Our Lord says, in the 14th chapter of John, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." So he says, after his exaltation, in his communication to the same favoured disciple, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." This could not have been said to the Old Testament Church. That Church knew Christ by promise, and type, and prophecy. But they did not and could not know him, as he was known to all his disciples and personal followers, and is still known to his people now, even as God-man, who did once in reality come in to his friends, and sup with them, and they with him, and can thus set forth and illustrate the spiritual communion which he holds with his Church now, in a way more vivid and more affecting than could be done to the Church of old. And this spiritual communion between God and his people is very clearly and fully explained by the apostle when he says, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy:

for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." And in his Second Epistle to the same Church, he farther illustrates this indwelling of the Spirit of God in the hearts of his people, as the fulfilment of the typical dwelling of God in the tabernacle and temple of old, when he says, "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." And all this is plainly implied in the passage under consideration; for nothing less than this can be meant by the declaration that God would look to the poor and the contrite, rather than to any house that could be built for his name, or any place that could be provided for his rest. "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite heart, and trembleth at my word."

But while the passage thus plainly teaches the same precious truth which is elsewhere taught in Scripture,—namely, the presence of God with his people by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each individually,—there is something peculiarly interesting in the language in which that truth is here stated. The expression is, "to this man will I look,"—that is, with complacency. I cannot help thinking, that in these words there is an allusion to the gracious answer returned to Solomon's prayer, at the dedication of the temple at Jerusalem. It will be recollected, that after Solomon had, with all reverence and humility, acknowledged that the house which he had built was utterly unworthy of being the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory, and could become so only through the infinite condescension of God, his earnest request was, "Have respect, therefore, to the prayer of thy servant, ... that thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there." A very solemn and significant answer was vouchsafed to this prayer, when "the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house." But, besides this, God was graciously pleased afterwards to appear to

Solomon, and, in very express terms, to answer his supplication "Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." And such is the promise which he makes in the passage before us to every individual believer,—every one who has become the temple of the Holy Ghost. The Lord looked with complacency on the temple at Jerusalem, for he saw there symbols of his own appointing, whereby to set forth the glorious work of his Son as Mediator,—the ark of the covenant,—the ten commandments placed under the mercy-seat, announcing the great truth that the claims of his infinitely holy and righteous law must be satisfied before mercy could be extended to sinners,—and the mercy-seat above, proclaiming the gracious truth, that the great work whereby these claims were fully satisfied had been undertaken, so that God could proclaim his name and his memorial, "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." And so God looks with complacency on each and all of his believing people; for in each and all of them, he sees the actual results, the blessed effects of the finished work of his Son,—the law vindicated, yea, magnified and made honourable,—and all the divine perfections harmoniously and gloriously displayed in the salvation of sinners.

If God, then, was pleased to say of the material temple, the symbol of Christ's work, "Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually," can his believing people suppose that less than this is meant in the promise, that he will look to them in whom he sees that work itself, living temples reared to his glory out of the ruins of a fallen world? Assuredly in regard to them he says, "Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." And he will be faithful to his promise if they wait on him, whatever be their circumstances. Are they mourning and downcast in spirit because of sin? He will look to them with a gracious eye, not only willing to forgive, but ready to impart to them, at the time and in the measure that he sees fit, a comforting sense of his forgiveness and favour. Has he visited them with afflic-

tion and painful bereavement? He will look to them with an eye of pity, even while he smites them, and will in due time bind up and heal the wound that he has inflicted, and convince them that it was in love and mercy that he chastened them. Are they struggling with temptation, and, under a deep sense of their weakness, and of the deceitfulness of their heart, are ready to despond and become weary of the conflict? He will look to them with an eye of tenderness, and as one, moreover, whose honour and glory are concerned in their final victory; and he will strengthen them according to their day and need. Are they earnestly desiring to be more submissive in all things to the divine will, to be more conformed to the image of Christ, and more zealous for the glory of God, lamenting that in all these respects they have hitherto come so far short? He will look to them with an approving eye,—he will read the secret longings of their souls,—and he will give them the desires of their heart. Are they filled with love and gratitude to the Saviour,—at the same time grieved that they still love him so little? God will look with complacency on the homage which they thus pay to his Son, whom he hath highly exalted, and whom he has commanded all men to honour, even as they honour the Father, and will impart to them a larger experience of the truth, and clearer discoveries of the greatness, the value, and the preciousness of the promise, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

XLV.

CHRIST THE TRUE ARK OF THE COVENANT.

JEREMIAH III. 16.

JEREMIAH was called to the prophetic office in the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah, and continued to exercise his office till the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,—a period of more than forty years. From the history of that period, as recorded in the Second Book of Kings and of Chronicles, we might conclude, that few, if any, of the prophets of the Lord, had been subjected to trials so painful and so protracted as those which Jeremiah endured. At the commencement of his mission, ninety years had already elapsed since the utter overthrow of the kingdom of Israel, or the ten tribes, when they were carried away captive by the king of Assyria. But Judah had not profited by this terrible example of the righteous judgment of God. There was, indeed, a reformation under Hezekiah, and again in the reign of Josiah, the last of which Jeremiah witnessed; for it is recorded in the history, that when Josiah was slain, in his somewhat rash enterprise against the king of Egypt, Jeremiah, as well as all Judah and Jerusalem, mourned and lamented for him. But it is evident, from the history itself, that these reformations were but apparent, and of short duration. That under Hezekiah was soon followed by an outbreak of profligacy and crime, in the reign of his son Manasseh, unexampled in the previous history of Judah. And even the reformation in the reign of Josiah,

remarkable as it was in many respects, was seen by God, and was very soon discovered to men to be, in regard to the nation at large, hollow and hypocritical; for while the sacred historian says of Josiah, "Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses: neither after him arose there any like him;" it is immediately added, showing that the people had not repented of or turned from the sins of the preceding reign, "Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem, which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there." And the reason of this sore judgment was soon apparent. The people of Judah, as well as the kings which successively reigned over them, after the time of Josiah, became more and more depraved; and, with the infatuation of men who had been stricken with judicial blindness, they rushed headlong to their ruin. "The Lord," it is said in the history, "sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets. Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did. And also for the innocent blood that he shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon."

Such was the dark and disastrous period during which Jeremiah prophesied. Judgment succeeded judgment, but with no other effect, except in a very limited degree, and on very few occasions, than to render Judah and Jerusalem more perverse, more obstinate in their ungodliness, and at the same time more presumptuously confident in their pretended title to the favour and protection of Jehovah. We might infer, therefore, from the history itself, that the office to which Jeremiah was called must have been painful and perilous in the extreme, especially after the death of Josiah; for he was commissioned to make, as it

were, the last effort, by rebuke, and remonstrance, and solemn warning, to turn ungodly kings, and false prophets, and apostate priests, and a backsliding people, from sin unto God. And what we might thus infer from the history is more than confirmed by the prophet's own writings. From these we learn that he was perpetually exposed to the bitterest reproach and persecution by his countrymen of all ranks and degrees, as one who was in league with the enemy, and who sought to discourage the hearts and weaken the hands of the people in what they thought their pious and patriotic endeavours to defend their country and their capital against their heathen adversaries. Often was his life in danger; and once it was preserved by the bold and affectionate interposition of an Ethiopian eunuch of the king's household, when there was not one of his brethren who dared or was willing to speak a word on his behalf. The remark, therefore, of a learned commentator is as true as it is striking, that "Jeremiah's escape from mortal danger, especially during the eleven years' reign of Jehoiakim, was a perpetual miracle, an illustrious fulfilment of the divine promise given to him at his call to the prophetical office, 'They shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.'" But bodily danger or suffering was the least of what Jeremiah was called to endure. The growing corruption of the people, which from the beginning was almost or altogether hopeless, must from day to day have vexed his righteous soul; and for one of his disposition and character to be required, single-handed, as it were, to contend with that corruption, to rebuke it with unsparing severity, and to announce, as a matter of absolute certainty, the terrible judgments which were coming on the people whom he pitied and loved,—all this was a trial, the severity of which we cannot easily estimate. It has been beautifully said of Jeremiah, "He was no second Elias; he had a soft disposition, a lively sensibility, a tender heart. And he who would so gladly have lived in peace and love with all, when he came forth in the service of the truth, must become a second Ishmael, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him; he who so warmly loved his people must see this love misapprehended, and himself branded as a betrayer of the people by those who were themselves their betrayers!"

This disposition of Jeremiah appeared at the very outset in his unwillingness to undertake the prophetical office at all, when, in reply to the divine intimation that he had been ordained a prophet unto the nations, he said, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child." We find him, too, at a later period, ready to sink under the weight of his trials, and, but for the constraining power of the Spirit of God, to relinquish his work altogether; as when he says, "Because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily: then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name: but his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." In this painful and protracted conflict, the grace of God was marvellously displayed in sustaining his servant, and giving him the victory, inasmuch as he continued to the end faithfully to warn his countrymen of the judgments which would assuredly overtake them,—judgments, which he was himself to witness; for we are told that "Jeremiah abode in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken; and he was there when Jerusalem was taken." And one of the means whereby the prophet's own faith, as well as that of the few who were still steadfast in God's covenant, was kept alive and strengthened, was the assurance which was from time to time given him, that notwithstanding the calamities which were about to overtake Judah and Jerusalem, God would never forsake or forget his true Church, and that brighter and more prosperous times awaited her than any that she had ever yet seen. Such predictions of Gospel or New Testament times are, indeed, met with comparatively seldom in the writings of Jeremiah; for the great work to which he was in the first instance called was to denounce the coming judgments of God on Judah, and the nations at large: "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." Still, we have in this prophet some very plain and precious predictions, not only of the appearing of Messiah personally, but of the prosperity and higher privileges of the Church in New Testament times. One of these is contained in the passage before us, and one which is nearly allied in meaning to the

precious promise in the 66th chapter of Isaiah, "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." In reference to the same dispensation, when the Church should no longer require such an intimation of the divine presence as the temple of old furnished, it is said in the passage before us, "In those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind; neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more."

It appears, from a preceding part of this chapter, that these words were addressed to or spoken of Israel,—the ten tribes who had revolted from the house of David,—as distinguished from Judah, which adhered to him. Of course, Israel could not hear the words of the prophet, for they had been carried away captive by the king of Assyria more than ninety years before. But the prophet's words were uttered in the hearing of Judah, and did, therefore, plainly and very emphatically intimate to them that their guilt was become greatly more aggravated than even Israel's guilt had been; and that from Israel, dispersed, as they had been, because of their backsliding, rather than from Judah, who still possessed their country and enjoyed their privileges, God was to select subjects of his redeeming grace wherewith to replenish his wasted Church. And so it is said in express terms, "The Lord said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north,"—that is, towards the quarter where captive Israel sojourned,—"and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." And this gracious invitation is followed up by another, if possible, still more encouraging: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family," or tribe, "and I will bring you to Zion." This promise has been understood by many, I believe, to mean that few only

would be received of backsliding Israel into the true Church of God,—so few that they might be represented as only one of a city, and two of a tribe. But it admits of a very different interpretation, and one that is full of encouragement to humble and convicted sinners of all times. The promise, it must be remembered, was addressed to Israel, or the ten tribes, who, in their national capacity, had been banished from the favour and presence of God. In such a state of exile, individuals among them, who might, by the sanctified improvement of God's dealings with them, be brought into a state of unfeigned contrition and sorrow for sin, and might earnestly desire to be restored again to the divine favour, would naturally conclude, that so long as the nation at large remained impenitent, and, therefore, in a state of exile, the penitence of individuals would avail them nothing, and that while the nation was shut out from the divine presence, they, as poor, unknown, and obscure individuals, could not be received into it. They could hardly help thinking so, for they could hardly conceive of being reinstated in the divine favour without being also restored to the land of their fathers; and it was, I think, to remove this suspicion that the prophet was commanded to address them in the words before us, "I will take you one of a city, and two of a family,"—that is, Though there be only one of a city, and two of a tribe, among you, that return to me in penitence and faith, while the rest of the nation remain impenitent, yet I will receive you, and bring you to Zion.

By bringing them to Zion, is, of course, to be understood God's bringing them near to himself, and investing them with the privileges of his children. Zion was still the place where the people of God were taught to expect that he would graciously meet with them; and, therefore, bringing them to Zion was the most intelligible and emphatic language wherein to express God's admitting them to his favour and fellowship. But the expression is not to be limited to the literal return of Israel to Jerusalem and Mount Zion, though that, too, did take place at the restoration of the Babylonish captivity of Judah, when many out of the tribes of Israel did avail themselves of the proclamation of Cyrus, and returned, with their brethren of Judah, to the land of Canaan. The whole spirit of the passage directs

us to a far more important change in the condition of those to whom the promise is addressed, than merely to their restoration to the enjoyment of those outward privileges which the literal Mount Zion could afford to the people of God subsequently to the time of Jeremiah. Their being brought thither obviously meant their being admitted to fellowship with God, through a clearer revelation of his will than had ever been enjoyed by the Church before; for it is added, in the 15th verse, "And I will give you pastors,"—that is, shepherds or leaders,—"according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." This, it will be remembered, is, in substance, the declaration repeatedly made concerning David, when it was said to him, "Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel;" and when it was said of him, "The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people."

But though this was, in the first instance, literally fulfilled in David, it was not exhausted in him; for there are Scriptures in abundance which show that David was thus spoken of as a type of Christ,—the man after God's own heart,—the true shepherd of the sheep,—the pastor who alone could really feed his people with knowledge and understanding. When the promise then is repeated, as in the passage before us, "I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding," the promise obviously refers to Messiah, and to the provision which he was to make for the spiritual nourishment of his people. And so we are taught in more express terms in the 23d chapter of this same book, where the promise before us is repeated, and is immediately identified with the promise of the appearance of Messiah himself: "And I will set up shepherds over them, which shall feed them." "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." It is to Gospel times, then, or the new dispensation, that the passage before us refers,—the time when the possession of a temporal inheritance in a national capacity, and the enjoyment of a

temple service on Mount Zion, would no longer be necessary to give believers the assurance of the divine favour, and access to the divine presence,—when at all times, and in all places, the believing worshipper, though alone, as a true worshipper, in an ungodly community, might feel that he was very near God, yea, dwelling even in the secret place of the Most High,—and when believers should have the promise here recorded repeated and confirmed by the Saviour himself, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

The interpretation which we have put on this prophecy is confirmed and illustrated by what is stated in the 16th verse, "And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall it be magnified any more;" or, as some render the latter part of the verse, "neither shall it be remembered, nor missed, and another will not be made." The two renderings are in substance the same; and, according to both, the verse plainly intimates that the ark of the covenant was to disappear or be lost, never again to be restored or renewed. This was, perhaps, the most alarming, and therefore the most unwelcome announcement that could have been made to the ancient covenant people. It has been well observed, respecting the high esteem in which the ark of the covenant was held in Israel, "that it was the most costly jewel of the people, the central point of their whole existence;" and the truth of the remark is manifest from every thing recorded in Scripture concerning it. When God was pleased to announce to Moses his gracious purpose of taking up his abode with Israel, and dwelling among them, his first command was to construct an ark of shittim wood, to overlay it with pure gold within and without, to deposit in it the two tables of stone on which the ten commandments were written by the finger of God, and to place the ark itself under the mercy-seat in the tabernacle which Moses was commanded to erect. It was on the mercy-seat over this ark that the cloud of glory rested, the visible symbol of the divine presence in the midst of his people; and it was in connection with the ark that

God vouchsafed the brightest manifestations of his glory in his interpositions on behalf of Israel. In proof and illustration of this remark, I need but refer to the overthrow of Jericho, after being compassed seven days by the priests bearing the ark, —the taking of the ark by the Philistines in the time of Eli, and its restoration again in consequence of the divine judgments, —the disasters which befell Israel in the days of Saul, when the ark was neglected, contrasted with their prosperity under David, who rested not till he had brought it out of the obscurity into which it had fallen, and carried it to the tent which he had pitched for it on Mount Zion,—and, finally, the display of the divine glory which was vouchsafed, when Solomon transferred the ark from its temporary abode to the temple which he had built for its permanent dwelling-place.

By all this, Israel were emphatically taught that their safety and prosperity were most intimately connected with the ark of the covenant. It was called, indeed, the ark of God's strength, —that in connection with which his strength was to be forthcoming on behalf of Israel; and it is accordingly said, in reference to its being permitted to fall into the hands of the Philistines, he "delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand." And it were easy to quote passages in abundance to show that by Israel at large the ark was regarded as the bulwark of their strength. With the carnal Israel, indeed, who were too often the majority, this feeling might be rather a superstitious awe than a reverential fear. But with all Israel the ark of the covenant was an object of profound esteem and incalculable value; and to all, therefore, the prediction of its final loss or removal must have been heavy tidings, if they believed the prediction, which we cannot doubt they would be slow to do. But if it was difficult for them to believe the part of the prophecy which warned them that the ark was to disappear for ever, much more difficult would it be for them to conceive that the time could ever come when they would cease to exclaim in exultation, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord,"—when neither should it come into their mind; neither should they remember it; neither should they miss it; neither should they magnify it any more. Part of the prophecy was very soon fulfilled in their bitter experience, even

in the lifetime of the prophet who uttered it; for after the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, the ark of the covenant was seen no more. Of course, it was wanting in the second temple, which was built after the return from Babylon; and the Jews had thus a solemn and perpetual intimation before them of the approaching removal of the whole system under which they and their fathers had lived, as but a system of types, a shadow of better things to come.

But while it was a mournful fact that the ark of the covenant was gone, it did not follow that they were reconciled to the want of it, or that they had ceased to remember or to miss it. It was still their fond hope that it would be restored in the latter day. Yet the prophet expressly declares, that the time would come when not only would they cease to look and long for it, but when it would not even come into their mind, or be remembered by them,—language which did most emphatically declare, not merely that they would be compensated for the loss of it, but that the compensation would so far exceed their loss, that what they once deplored as a privation, they would rejoice and glory in as unspeakable gain. To the great body of Judah and Jerusalem, the prophet's prediction would, in all probability, appear as an idle tale, and even the faithful few, who did believe that the mouth of the Lord had spoken it, might have great difficulty in conceiving such a manifestation of the grace and goodness of God towards his people as would have the effect here described,—the effect of leading them to regard as comparatively of no value what from generation to generation had been looked on as the strength and the glory of Israel. But believing that it would be even as God had said, how consoling to them, as well as to the prophet himself, to be assured that however disastrous might be the calamities which had come, and were yet coming upon them, God was not to cast off and make a full end of his people,—that he was yet to appear in surpassing glory as the God of Israel, making bare his holy arm for their deliverance, and turning again the captivity of Jacob!

In what way, then, and at what time, was this remarkable prophecy to be fulfilled? To this question there can be but one answer. The prophecy was fulfilled in the appearing of Christ, the great antitype of the ark, being himself "the brightness of

the Father's glory, and the express image of his person,"—God manifest in the flesh. The cloud of glory over the mercy-seat above the ark did, no doubt, very significantly, though but symbolically, intimate, that God could be gracious and merciful, in perfect consistency with the integrity and unchangeable rigour of his law. But the symbol was exchanged for and gave place to the reality, when Christ appeared to vindicate the honour and satisfy the demands of the divine law, in accordance with his own voluntary engagement, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." The Jews, generally, indeed, did not see in the person of Christ the fulfilment of this or of any other prophecy whatever. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;" and they "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." The ark of the covenant was at best only an inanimate pledge that God was near, and would be found gracious to all who sought him in faith, and in the appointed way. Christ was God himself, in very deed dwelling with men on the earth. The ark of the covenant was removed beyond even the sight of the congregation of Israel, being laid up in that inner sanctuary, the holy of holies, into which the high priest alone was permitted to enter, and that once a-year, and not without blood. Christ appeared everywhere, at all times, and accessible to men of all degrees, without any thing to terrify, or even to awe, except that moral purity, and dignity, and greatness, before which the most arrogant impiety was paralysed, and which constrained even those who were sent to take him to say, "Never man spake like this man."

And what did men find in Christ when they did approach and enter into converse with him? Even the most malignant of his enemies,—those who sought to ensnare him, and were baffled in their devilish devices by his divine wisdom,—even they, if they had spoken the truth, would have confessed that they were awed as much by his meekness and forbearance, as by the wisdom whereby he exposed their crafty designs. But I speak not of those. I refer to the poor,—to the contrite in

spirit,—to those who trembled at God's word. What did they find in Christ when they approached, and spread out their case before him? Was there one that could say, I applied to him, and was rejected? nay, was there one who could say, He did hear and heal me; but his manner was severe, and his words were harsh? No, none who approached Christ could say so; none could have endured to be asked whether he had so received them. The harshest word in appearance that ever passed the lips of the Saviour, in addressing those who sought his aid, was that which he spoke to the Syro-Phœnician woman, when he said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." But who does not see and feel that even this seemingly austere and discouraging address was the expression of a compassion, tenderness, and love altogether divine? It was designed to call forth the bold and believing reply of that remarkable subject of divine grace, "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table;" and to afford him the opportunity of manifesting his grace, and condescension, and kindness, in a more affecting manner than it would otherwise have been done, when he said to her, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." With regard to those, then, who thus saw Christ, and believed on him, who experienced the virtue which proceeded from him to cure their bodily diseases, and felt the efficacy of his divine power in healing their spiritual malady, and pacifying their conscience,—in regard to all such, could they, after such experience, lament, as Israel of old did, after the ark of the covenant, and long for its being again restored as a token to them of the divine presence,—a pledge that God was near to them, and would hear and answer them in the time of trouble? May we not suppose that then they understood the meaning of the prediction before us; and that they would be ready to say, Now we no longer need to remember the ark of the covenant, or to visit it, or to magnify it any more? I do not say that the primitive Christian Church, the first Jews who believed in Jesus, did readily and at once give up all their predilections for the ordinances of the Old Testament economy. It was very different. They continued long to be "zealous of the law," retaining their early-formed and long-cherished attachment to the ordinances of the temple worship. This, however,

was their infirmity,—a remaining prejudice, the strength of which we cannot easily estimate, but with which we can very easily sympathise. But with all this infirmity and prejudice, what would have been their answer if they had been asked whether they would take the temple service, with the restoration of the ark of the covenant, and even the renewed appearance of the cloud of glory above it over the mercy-seat, rather than the presence of Him whose words had been to them the words of eternal life? Would not their answer have been, that in comparison with what they then enjoyed, the ark of the covenant of the Lord was not to be thought of, or remembered, or longed for, or magnified any more?

And should not this be the sentiment of believers still? There is perhaps no passage in Scripture in which the superiority of the privileges of believers under the New Testament dispensation above those of the Old Testament Church is set forth more concisely, but at the same time more clearly and emphatically, than in the words before us. And this superiority is enjoyed, and will be enjoyed, by believers of all times under the new dispensation. Believers now, indeed, do not enjoy the bodily presence of Christ as the first believers did. But they do enjoy his presence notwithstanding, for his Spirit dwells with them and in them, revealing Christ to them in all the riches of his grace and mercy, taking of the things that are Christ's, and showing them unto their soul, and enabling them so to realise his compassion and mercy, that they may say, "Whom having not seen we love; in whom though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Humble and contrite sinners, who tremble at God's word, can surely conceive how they would have felt had they seen and heard Christ in the days of his flesh;—how the tenderness of his demeanour, the meekness and lowliness of his character, the readiness with which he received, and the compassion with which he treated the most forlorn of the miserable outcasts from human society, and the gracious invitation which he addressed to all, without exception, to come to him and he would give them rest,—I say, the humble and broken in spirit can surely conceive how, if they had seen and heard all this, they would thereby have been encouraged to apply to him, and in the confident expectation, too,

that they would not apply in vain. But Christ is not changed. He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." The manifestation of his compassion, and tenderness, and readiness to deliver, during his sojourn on the earth, was intended for the encouragement not only of those who were eye-witnesses of his deeds of mercy and benevolence, but of all to whom the glad tidings of his salvation shall ever come. Let the humble and downcast in spirit seek to realise all this; and they will find in their experience that the promise we have been considering was intended for and has been fulfilled in them,—that they have a liberty in approaching God altogether unknown to the Church in Old Testament times,—that they need not any outward visible token of the divine presence to give them the assurance of God's nearness to them,—that they can come with childlike confidence to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy to pardon, and grace to help them in time of need,—that they have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

XLVI.

THE CHURCH CHRIST'S THRONE.

JEREMIAH III. 17.

THIS verse is to be interpreted in connection with the preceding context. The expression, "At that time," refers, of course, to a time previously spoken of; and, therefore, we must look back to what is previously stated to ascertain what that time was. And there we find a period spoken of in such terms as can leave us in no doubt as to what it was. We do not, indeed, find there any particular date expressly given, nor any individual mentioned by name from which to infer what the expression, "at that time," precisely means. But we have such a description of the time, or at least of the state and feeling of the Church at the time, as necessarily determines the period foretold by the prophet. It is described as the time when the true Israel, the Church of God, should no more say, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord,"—that is, should no more point to or exult and glory in the ark of the covenant as their defence and their pledge of security. Nay, it is said that when the time here foretold should arrive, the ark of the covenant should not even come into their mind, neither should they remember it, neither should they miss it, neither should they make it again, or magnify it any more. This is a very emphatic description,—one that can hardly be misunderstood by any one who is at all familiar with the history of the ark of the covenant, the place which it occupied in the ordinances of the Old Testament Church, and the importance

attached to it by the people of Israel, as well by the carnal, ignorant, and superstitious, as by the true Israel,—Abraham's spiritual seed. Great care was taken to impress the people with a sense of the sacredness of the ark. It was placed in the holy of holies under the mercy-seat, in the tabernacle erected by Moses in the wilderness. When the tabernacle was from time to time taken down in the journeyings of Israel towards Canaan, Aaron and his sons alone were permitted to go in to cover the ark, and to put in the staves whereby it was to be borne; and the sons of Kohath, who bare it by the staves, were forbidden, on pain of death, to touch it, or to go in to see when it was covered. And this injunction was at a future period, and on more than one occasion, enforced in a very solemn manner. It is recorded of the men of Bethshemesh, whither the ark had been sent up after its temporary captivity among the Philistines, that the Lord smote them with a great slaughter, "because they had looked into the ark of the Lord." And when David first set himself to bring up the ark from the house of Abinadab, where it had long remained, and to place it in the tent which he had pitched for it on Mount Zion, we are told that "they set the ark of God upon a new cart," "and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. . . . . And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God."

With regard to the importance which was attached to the ark by the people of Israel generally as their strength and their protection, we have a very striking illustration of it even in one of their most presumptuous acts regarding it. I refer to the occasion on which, being smitten before the Philistines, because of their backsliding and sin, they took the daring step of bringing the ark into the field of battle, as if it were impossible that God could permit them to be vanquished to the hazard of that holy thing being profaned. When the people returned to the camp after their defeat, and the death of about four thousand men, "the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh

among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." It was an impious appeal that they thus made to God; and they were terribly rebuked for their impiety. Not only were they disappointed in their expected deliverance, inasmuch as they were again smitten before their enemies with a very great slaughter, even of thirty thousand men, but the ark itself was permitted to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised. But their betaking themselves to such a resource, superstitious as it was in conception, and daring as it was in deed, did very clearly show, that, in their opinion, the divine power that was needful to protect and deliver them was to be put forth in connection with the ark,—the ark of God's strength. And that such, also, was the conviction of the believing portion of Israel, is abundantly evident from the whole tenor of the Old Testament Scriptures. The very passage, indeed, to which I have just referred, furnishes a very affecting illustration of this remark; for in the dying declaration of the widowed daughter-in-law of Eli, we find recorded what must have been the sentiment of every devout and godly believer in Israel. To her it was no mitigation of sorrow, far less a matter of joy, to be told that a man-child had been born into the world. She could only, with her last breath, name her child Ichabod, saying, "The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken." If such, then, was the place which God himself had assigned to the ark among his institutions, and such the estimation in which it was held by Israel at large; what could possibly reconcile the Church to the permanent loss or removal of it? It did, indeed, disappear at the destruction of the first temple, if not before; and it was not again restored. But Israel still cherished the hope that it would be restored in the latter day; and never, therefore, could they altogether cease to lament after the ark until Christ came, and until they were so enlightened by divine teaching as to see in him the true ark, the great antitype of that which their believing fathers had held so sacred as the ark of God's strength, whereby he did so often interpose to deliver, or to give them the victory. It was only then that they would no more say, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord;" neither should it come to mind; neither should they remember it; neither should they visit it; neither should they exalt it any more.

The verse before us, then, like the preceding context, refers to New Testament times; and the language employed in it must be interpreted in accordance with this principle. It is said, then, that in these times they should "call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord." With regard to the literal Jerusalem, the place which God chose to put his name there, it had been the throne of God from the time that it had been so chosen; for there rested the cloud of glory over the mercy-seat, above the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence. And, accordingly, Jerusalem was called "the city of the great King," the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory, where God was "known in her palaces for a refuge." All this, however, though it was a great and precious reality to the Church of old, was but a shadow or symbol compared with what was vouchsafed to the people of God, when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among" them, and they "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Then Jerusalem became the throne of God as it had never been before; for then appeared personally in the midst of her the true heir of David's throne, he who is to "reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of whose kingdom there shall be no end." The carnal Jews, indeed, did not receive or recognise him. To them he had "no form nor comeliness;" and when they saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him. But then was fulfilled the prediction of the prophet, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." And through all this lowliness the Nathanaels in Jerusalem, those who had spiritual discernment, beheld his kingly glory, and paid him the homage of spiritual subjects when they said unto him, "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel."

The literal Jerusalem did not know the day of her merciful visitation. She rejected Him whom she should have acknowledged as her king; yea, she crucified and slew the Lord of glory. But by his very death he founded a kingdom that cannot be moved, and made provision for establishing and making the spiritual Jerusalem "a praise in the earth." And this is the Jerusalem of which it is here said, that it should "be called the

throne of the Lord,"—even the true Church,—believers in their collective capacity,—the subjects of Christ's spiritual government. This is Zion, the hill of God's holiness, on which he has set his anointed king, that he may reign in and over his people, making them willing in a day of his power, subduing them to himself, and subduing their enemies under them, and overruling all things for the manifestation of the divine glory in their salvation. Personally he is not present with them; for having finished the work for which he was humbled, and for the accomplishment of which he tabernacled for a season on the earth, he ascended up on high, and sat down at the right hand of God. But when he did so, he "led captivity captive," and "received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." And he does dwell among them by his Spirit, the Comforter, whom he promised to the disciples, to take his place with them, to comfort them in his absence, and to reveal him and his work to them more fully and clearly than he himself had done. And by his Spirit he continually manifests his kingly, his almighty power, in and by and for his people. Every instance of a sinner's conversion "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," is as much the result of his divine authority and power as any miracle of mercy and kindness that he ever wrought during his sojourn among men. In every such instance that power had to encounter all the resistance of the carnal mind, which is itself enmity against God, and all the artifices and devices of the wicked one, strengthening that enmity, and labouring either to keep the awakened soul in a state of subjection to sin, or to drive it to despair. And how glorious does the power of Christ appear, when we reflect that this work of conversion is continually going on, and that countless multitudes, in all ages, have been set free from the bondage of sin and Satan,—a bondage in which all would willingly have remained, and from which many struggled long against being delivered! To every true believer,—every one who knows his own heart, and who understands and believes that, in his original condition, he was by nature a child of wrath, even as others, "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in him,"—to such a man it will appear a very marvellous thing that there should be a Church on earth at all,—that there should

be any portion of the children of men who seek and find their happiness in God,—in the enjoyment of his favour and fellowship, and in a growing resemblance to his divine image. Such a man will feel, for it is a matter of experience with himself, that the existence of a Church, a body of converted and regenerated sinners, is a more marvellous thing than creation itself, and will be ready to acknowledge that He only "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness" could shine into the hearts of men, to give them "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

But it is not only in the conversion of sinners that the kingly power and authority of Christ is manifested. Having obtained the victory over their corrupt and alienated affections, and over the great adversary who held them in bondage, he has to maintain the ascendancy which he gained over them in their conversion, by the unceasing agency of the same power whereby they were delivered from the bondage of Satan, and brought "into captivity," "to the obedience of Christ." There is still a law in their members warring against the law of their mind, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin, which is in their members. The world, too, with its manifold allurements, is perpetually gaining, if not the absolute ascendancy, at least an undue influence over them. And Satan does not cease his efforts to recover his lost power, and to bring them again into subjection, as they once were, when he led them captive at his pleasure. By his direct mysterious assaults, or by the instrumentality of temptations and trials, which he knows well how to strengthen and aggravate, he desires to have them that he may sift them as wheat, or seeks, as a roaring lion, to devour them. Against such tendencies from within, and such temptations from without, believers in their own strength would be utterly powerless. If they are kept unto salvation, it is by the mighty power of God. But they are so kept. It is their security, that the power which is directed against them for their eternal ruin is directed against the throne of the Lord. Christ sits King on the holy hill of Zion, even his Church, and, therefore, no weapon that is formed against her can prosper. And while Christ thus reigns in and over his Church, he rules the nations also, and determines all events in subserviency to her best

interests. An ungodly world dreams not of this truth, and the Church herself can comprehend but little of the plans and purposes of Him who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. She is not able, therefore, to perceive how the endless variety of events which are continually taking place, and which affect not individuals only, but communities and kingdoms, should be so overruled and combined as ultimately to contribute to the accomplishment of Christ's mediatorial work. On the contrary, the changes and revolutions which take place among the nations, and the disorder and ungodliness which accompany or follow these changes, so far from appearing favourable, may seem to be very adverse, yea, very disastrous to the cause of Christ. But if the people of God believe that Christ reigneth as Mediator, and that he must reign till all his enemies are put under his feet, then they must also believe that no event can happen which will not redound to his glory as Mediator, and, consequently, to the glory and honour also of his people, on whose behalf he undertook the mediatorial office. Dark, then, and mysterious as his providential government may appear to be, they cannot doubt that it is not only subordinate, but subservient to his kingdom of grace, and that when all the mysteries of this present system of things shall be unfolded, it will appear that the poor, despised, and persecuted Church on earth, was indeed "the throne of the Lord," from which, and for which, and by which, he put forth his almighty power, subduing his own people unto himself, and putting his enemies under his feet. And thus, when all darkness and mystery shall have been cleared away, it will be found that to the Church herself, the redeemed of the Lord, as well as "to principalities and powers in heavenly places," will "be made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

It is thus, I think, that Jerusalem, or the Church, is, since Christ's appearing, the throne of the Lord. And if so, then the question naturally occurs, In what way, or to what extent, do individual members of the Church participate in the honour and privileges of the Church at large? Christ is her Head and King; he rules over her and in her; and for her sake he exercises a constant and almighty control over all the kingdoms of the earth, making the wrath of man to praise him, and restrain-

ing the remainder of his wrath. This is a very sublime and a very precious truth. But, how does it affect individuals? how does this truth become precious to them? It is not enough to say that Christ sits enthroned in his Church, King on Zion, ruling in her, and over her, and on her behalf. Individuals cannot be satisfied with this truth, sublime and glorious as it is, without inquiring how and to what extent they can or do personally enjoy the presence of their Lord and King. If they are in earnest about a participation in the blessings which flow from Christ's presence in his Church, they cannot rest contented with the thought that they will, somehow, participate in the advantages which that presence imparts to or diffuses through the body at large. This, I fear, is all that multitudes of professing Christians have ever expected, or even desired, from their ostensible connection with the Church of Christ. They read and hear of his headship over the Church, and of his being with her always, even unto the end of the world; and they cherish the vague hope that they will come in for a share of the blessings which he thus imparts to the Church at large, without knowing, and without wishing to know, very distinctly what these blessings are. They would rather shrink from any thing like a close and personal transacting with Christ, especially when they are told that his presence with the Church, as her King and Head, or, in the language before us, that Jerusalem, or the Church, being called the throne of the Lord, means, not only that he rules in and over his people in their collective capacity, but that he sits enthroned in the heart and affections of each of his people individually.

This, I fear, is a very unwelcome truth to many, even of those who would not willingly forego all interest in the blessings which they suppose must flow from Christ's presence with his Church at large, the great body of his believing people. But it is the very truth which believers, those who are in earnest about an interest in the blessings of Christ's kingdom, will be most anxious to realise. They cannot be satisfied with the idea that Christ is present with the Church as a body, ruling over her, and ruling over the world for her good, without having some good ground to hope that he is present with them personally by his Spirit, subduing them unto himself, ruling and defending them, and conquering

all his and their enemies,—not only the enemies of his Church generally, but the enemies with which they individually have daily to contend. They will feel, too, that if they are indeed the subjects of his kingdom, true members of the Church which is the throne of the Lord, then Christ must have the sovereignty of their heart and affections to the exclusion of every idol that would be a rival to him there. They may, indeed, have but too much reason to confess and lament that hitherto his supremacy in their heart has not been so absolute as it ought to be, and that their affections have been too frequently divided between him and the world. But it will be the object of their earnest desire and their constant aim to have their every thought and desire brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and to be more habitually and entirely under the constraining influence of his love. Nor will they ever be satisfied with any thing short of paying to him this undivided homage. And in like manner with regard to Christ's sovereign control in the government of the world, they will recognise it not only in all those great events which affect communities, and kingdoms, and the Church at large, but in every thing which befalls themselves personally, believing that his care extends to every individual, even the humblest and most obscure of his people, regarding the comforts which they enjoy as expressions of his kindness and love, and acknowledging that if trials are appointed them, it is because he sees they stand in need of such discipline, and therefore in faithfulness afflicts them. It is thus that Christ as King in Zion rules in the heart of every individual of his people; and it is in proportion as they are thus brought into subjection to him that they enjoy the liberty of the sons of God.

But the surpassing glory of the New Testament dispensation, and the superior privileges which the Church was then to enjoy, are still further foretold and illustrated in the next clause of the verse: "And all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem." It will be recollected that the expression, "the name of the Lord," does very frequently occur in Scripture, and is applied to every manifestation which God was pleased to make of himself, his being, perfections, and character. Here, indeed, as in various other passages, the name of the Lord is equivalent to the Lord, or his actual manifested

presence. Thus, in the instructions given by Moses to the children of Israel, as to the place and manner of presenting their offerings to the Lord, it is said, "Unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come, and thither ye shall bring your burnt-offerings and your sacrifices." And again, "There shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you." In these passages, the dwelling-place of the name of the Lord is called also the habitation or dwelling-place of the Lord himself. And accordingly, when Jerusalem was afterwards chosen as the place here spoken of, we find that the Lord put his name there, by vouchsafing to give his people a peculiar manifestation of his presence in the cloud of glory over the mercy-seat. But if, in consequence of this manifestation of himself, it was said of Jerusalem of old, that the Lord had put his name there, in how much higher a sense may it not be said of Jerusalem, or the Church now, that the Lord causes his name to dwell there? Christ actually appeared, "God manifest in the flesh," in very deed dwelling with men on the earth; and in consequence of his finished work, God has been revealed with a fulness and a clearness unknown to the Old Testament Church. And in virtue, moreover, of Christ's exaltation to the right hand of the Father, provision has been made for a more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit than was formerly vouchsafed to the Church. And the consequence of this clearer and more glorious manifestation of the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem, the New Testament Church, is here foretold to be, that "all the nations" should "be gathered unto it."

Even in the old time, strangers from among the nations who heard the fame of the Lord God of Israel, and of the mighty works which he had wrought on behalf of his people, and who were attracted thereby to seek after him to the place which he had chosen to put his name there, were admitted to participate in the privileges which had been specially conferred on Israel. The Israelites were expressly enjoined so to admit the stranger who should come among them to inquire after the great name of the Lord their God; and this injunction did graciously inti-

mate, that the blessings bestowed on Israel were one day to be extended, according to the Abrahamic covenant, to all the nations of the earth. Still, the number of those who were thus gathered from among the nations into the Church of God was comparatively small, there being no express provision made for the conversion of the Gentiles at large. But here it is foretold, or rather promised, as the peculiar glory of the New Testament dispensation, that "all the nations shall be gathered" to the Church,—"to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem." As the symbol of the divine presence over the ark of old was but the type of Christ's manifestation in the flesh, and of his presence in the Church by his Spirit; so the strangers that were then, from time to time, attracted by the name of the Lord at Jerusalem, were but a type of the multitudes which no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation, and people, who were to be drawn unto Christ when he should be lifted up, and who should be made to see in his cross the brightest display of the glory of Jehovah, as the just God and the Saviour. And for the accomplishment of this promise, Christ himself expressly appointed means,—means which must be ample enough for the attainment of the object, otherwise infinite wisdom would not have appointed them. What they are is expressed in a single sentence,—his last command to the disciples: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go ye, therefore, and teach all nations; .... and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The first disciples were not disobedient to the heavenly command; they were not insensible to the honour and the privilege which their divine Master had conferred upon them. They were willing witnesses unto him, "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth;" and abundantly were their labours blessed in the conversion of sinners,—the ingathering to the Church of men out of all countries. Have the professed disciples of Christ in subsequent times been equally faithful? If so, why is it that there are still so many nations in the earth where the sound of the Gospel has not yet been heard? I do not ask why these nations have not been Christianised or converted? That is beyond the reach of men's power; and, therefore, men are not required to be responsible for the conversion of their

fellow-men. But they are responsible for conveying to others that truth which has proved the power of God and the wisdom of God to the salvation of their own souls,—and that by the faith of which alone others can be turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;" and on every man, therefore, who is himself in possession of the Gospel, and has participated in its consolations, there rests a portion of the responsibility imposed by the Saviour's command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

But dark and desolate as many a portion of the earth still is, our heritage has been given us in a land of light. Careless and indifferent as the professed disciples of Christ might too often be in regard to other countries, some were found who, influenced by the grace and guided by the providence of Him who is head over all things to the Church, became the bearers of the precious treasure of the Gospel to these shores; and now, after many a cloudy and dark day, when the light was well-nigh extinguished, it shines on us in all its effulgence and purity. Judging, then, from outward circumstances, we should conclude that the promise has been fulfilled in regard to us. We are of the nations, Gentiles, who were naturally "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise;" and we have been gathered unto the Church, "to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem." Professedly we believe in Christ, and form a portion of that Church in and over which he sits enthroned as King, and for which he exercises his mighty power and sovereignty in the government of the world. But does our zeal, character, and position correspond with our outward profession and circumstances? It was said by the apostle in reference to his countrymen, his kinsmen according to the flesh, "They are not all Israel which are of Israel." And so it may be,—nay, so, I fear, it certainly is still. As in the old time many assembled at Jerusalem, the place which God had chosen to put his name there, and outwardly took part in all the appointed ordinances of that holy place, while they had no spiritual discernment of the nature and meaning of these ordinances, and no real desire for the spiritual blessings which were designed thereby to be conveyed; so there may be multitudes now who regularly observe the still simpler ordinances of the Gospel, who

never felt their need, and, therefore, never saw the value or the desirableness of those blessings which the Gospel offers to the acceptance of all. What then will it profit such persons that they have outwardly been gathered to the visible Church, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem? The promise, in its spiritual acceptation, has not been fulfilled in them; for they have not experienced the fulfilment of another promise which is inseparable from it,—namely, that in the concluding clause of the verse, "Neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart."

The expression, "walking in the imagination of their evil heart," or "their own heart," is repeatedly used in Scripture, but most frequently by the prophet Jeremiah; and it always denotes a course of living and acting opposed to the revealed law or will of God. It does not refer to any one particular sin or transgression. It is descriptive of an unconverted man,—of one who lives not to God but to himself, and who can have no capacity, therefore, for the enjoyment of fellowship with God. It is here promised, then, concerning those who were to be gathered unto the Church, "to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem," that they should not "walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart;" that is, in other words, that by the gracious operation of the Spirit of God, they should be converted, renewed in the spirit of their mind, turned from dumb idols, their own vain devices, to the service of the living God, and qualified or made meet for the enjoyment of communion with him, and with all his holy intelligent creatures. And it is plain that unless this change were wrought upon them, they could derive no enjoyment and no benefit from being brought into the visible Church, outwardly gathered to those among whom the name of the Lord is. They may, indeed, by such a connection, reap some worldly advantage. It may, in certain circumstances, add greatly to their respectability, and therefore contribute to the success of their worldly business and enterprises. But what has this to do with their soul's salvation? "The redemption of their soul is precious." No man can save himself, or "by any means redeem his brother." The great and momentous question then with us is, Have we experienced the fulfilment of the promise contained in the last clause of this

passage? Have we been made to cease from walking after the imagination of our evil heart, which is enmity against God? Has this enmity of the carnal mind been slain? Have we been converted? Have we been born again? Have we passed from death unto life? Have we been created again in Christ Jesus unto good works? It is only in consequence of this mighty change having passed upon us, according to the promise in the last clause of the verse, that we can derive any benefit from the promise in the preceding clause,—that of being gathered unto the visible Church as we have been. To participate in the blessings here promised, we must be gathered by conversion unto the true Church, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem. It will avail us nothing that we live in the full blaze of Gospel light, seeing what prophets and wise men of old desired to see, but were not permitted, if He "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness" hath not "shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

XLVII.

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

JEREMIAH XXIII. 5, 6.

THE promise contained in these words must have been a very precious one to Jeremiah himself, as well as to the remnant of Judah and Jerusalem,—the few who had remained steadfast in the covenant of their God amidst the general defection of their brethren. The prophet Jeremiah, like others who had gone before him, was commissioned to warn his countrymen of the judgment that was coming upon them because of their apostasy and ungodliness. But there was this peculiarity in the case of Jeremiah, that the judgments which he foretold were to be executed in his own time,—he was himself to be an eye-witness of all the calamities which he predicted. He warned his countrymen that the then existing king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, would come up against Jerusalem, and would prevail against it, and would take the city, and burn it and the temple with fire, and carry away the people captive to Babylon. And all this the prophet actually saw fulfilled; for we are told that he "abode in the court of the prison," to which he had been committed because of his fidelity in warning his ungodly countrymen, and "was there when Jerusalem was taken." Jeremiah was thus placed in circumstances peculiarly painful and trying. He was commissioned to announce the coming judgments of God,—judgments not only very terrible in themselves, but also very near and certain; for though his warnings were both fitted and designed to

awaken his countrymen to a sense of their guilt, and to lead them to repentance, so that the calamities with which they were threatened might be mitigated at least, if not averted, yet it was very plainly intimated to him that his warnings would be in vain, and that the Lord would certainly bring upon Jerusalem, and upon all her towns, all the evil that he had pronounced against it; because they hardened their necks, that they might not hear his words. We cannot easily conceive, then, a more severe trial than that to which Jeremiah was exposed by being made the bearer of such a message as that with which he was entrusted. To announce the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the captivity of Judah, as events that were certainly to take place in the lifetime of the very men whom he addressed, must have exasperated to the highest pitch an ungodly and profligate generation, and awakened against the prophet feelings of the bitterest revenge. And we find, accordingly, that but for the special interposition of God's providence, they would have prevailed against him, and would have taken their revenge on him. Even this, however, was the lightest part of the prophet's trial. The burden which pressed most heavily upon his spirit was the hopeless apostasy of his brethren, and the inevitable ruin which he foresaw was about to overtake them. The whole tenor of his writings abundantly testifies that he was not more distinguished for piety and godliness, than for tenderness of heart, and a deep and affectionate concern for the best interests of his countrymen; and that if he shrunk from the discharge of the duty committed to him, it was more from an unwillingness to announce the terrible calamities that were coming on Judah and Jerusalem, than from any dread of the personal danger to which such announcement might expose him. And we find that he did repeatedly seek to make his escape from the painful and depressing duty of uttering warnings which he knew would be disregarded, and of foretelling judgments which he as certainly knew would be inflicted. But he was not permitted to relinquish the work to which he had been called. The Spirit constrained him to speak. "Then I said, I will not make mention of the Lord, nor speak any more in his name: but his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." And

so he continued, with feelings of profound pity for his infatuated countrymen, to give utterance to the most solemn warnings of coming judgment, till it might be said of the book which bears his name, as it was said of the scroll which in vision was spread before the prophet Ezekiel, "There was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe."

But through the dark cloud that was thus gathering over Judah and Jerusalem, there broke occasionally gleams of sunshine; and to one of the brightest of these the passage before us directs us. The judgments which the prophet foretold were so terrible, and the ruin which awaited Judah apparently so overwhelming, that Jeremiah himself, as well as the small remnant of the true Israel,—the few hidden ones who constituted the Church,—might have been ready to despond, and to say, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" "Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?" But they were not to be left so to despond. Though a small remnant, they were precious in the sight of the Lord; and he would not fail to make himself known to them as the faithful and the covenant-keeping God. The fewer, indeed, that they were in number, and the more that ungodliness prevailed around them, the more did they stand in need of some new token of the divine favour, a new assurance that God remembered the covenant sworn to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. And it has always been God's gracious method of dealing with his people, to make seasons of great trial and discouragement to be seasons also of great refreshing, as the history of the Church and the experience of believers do alike testify. So, accordingly, he dealt with the Church in Jeremiah's day. While the main object of the prophet's mission was to announce the certain and speedy execution of the divine judgments, and while these judgments formed the burden of his commission, the chief subject of all that he spoke and wrote, he was commissioned also to declare, from time to time, that notwithstanding the calamities which had already overtaken Israel, and were impending over Judah, and notwithstanding the low state to which the true Church would, in consequence of these calamities, be reduced, God would again visit and redeem his people, and raise up an horn of salvation for them in the house of his servant David.

Such, in substance, is the prediction before us. That prediction assumes that all the calamities which the prophet foretold would overtake Judah,—that the true Church, the people of God, would be involved in these calamities,—and that even the royal house of David would itself be brought so low as to be apparently extinct; for the expression, "I will raise unto David a righteous Branch," conveys, as in other passages in the prophetic writings, the idea of a bud or tender sprout springing from the root of a tree that has been cut down, and is to all appearance dead. This prediction, therefore, gave the Church of that time no ground to expect that the judgments foretold by the prophet would not be executed. On the contrary, it implied that the severest of all the calamities which he predicted would assuredly overtake Judah, and that even the house and the throne of David would, to all appearance, be utterly overthrown,—that house and that kingdom concerning which God had said to his servant, "They shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." But this very intimation of the certain fulfilment of all that Jeremiah foretold, would serve to render the promise we are considering more precious in itself to the people of God, as well as to strengthen their faith in its final accomplishment; for it was an assurance to the Church of that time, and of all subsequent times, that God gave the promise in the perfect foreknowledge of all the disastrous events that were to befall Israel and Judah, —and that in spite of them all, and notwithstanding the low, and apparently hopeless condition to which they might be reduced, he had provided for the due fulfilment of his promise. All this is plainly intimated in the description here given of the Deliverer promised to David, when he is called a "Branch," or, as it is elsewhere expressed, "a rod out of the stem of Jesse,"—"a Branch out of his roots,"—even "a root out of a dry ground," when it appeared to be utterly lifeless and dried up. And the character of this Branch, this bud or sprout, in the decayed house of David, is delineated in language which must have been peculiarly expressive and encouraging to the Church of that time: "I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper," or act wisely, "and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth."

There is here an obvious contrast between the King thus promised, and all who had ever sat or ever would sit on the throne of David. He was to be righteous, and he was to reign, and act wisely,—in other words, he was to possess righteousness, power, and wisdom, and so execute judgment and justice in the land. How different from all, even the best of the kings who had gone before him! It was the folly and ungodliness of many of these kings that withered their own strength, and brought disaster and ruin upon the people, as the suffering remnant of the Church in Jeremiah's time knew in their bitter experience. And even with regard to the best of them, how often did their sin and folly bring suffering upon themselves and their people! David himself, of whom it is said, in the very words of this passage, that he "executed judgment and justice unto all his people," even David did so sin as to entail upon himself and upon his family very grievous calamities, inasmuch as it was said to him, "The sword shall never depart from thine house;" and when, in the folly and pride of his heart, he numbered the people, his sin was visited with a sore national judgment. Whatever, therefore, might be the benefits or blessings which the people of Judah derived from the good kings who from time to time ruled over them, still the character of these kings was so defective that their influence frequently operated for evil as well as for good. No doubt, the prosperity of Judah might, generally speaking, be measured by the wisdom and godliness of their kings. Their whole history bears testimony to this fact; and the fact itself, I think, was an intimation to the Church, that the glorious things spoken of Zion should be realised under the government of "a king" who should "reign in righteousness," and who should "be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The best of the kings, therefore, from David downward, even in their best estate, and in the wisest and most successful of their measures, were but mere types, faint shadows of Him who was to spring from the decayed root of David's house. And this is here plainly intimated; for it is said, in very unqualified terms, obviously in such a way as could not be said of any preceding reign, "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely." And if the Church could have doubted

that this language foretold a state of peace, and prosperity, and safety, immeasurably surpassing all that Israel and Judah had ever experienced, even in the brightest periods of their history, the doubt would have been dispelled by the glorious title here given to the promised King of David's house, "And this is his name whereby he shall be called, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

How far Jeremiah himself, and the Church in his day, understood the character of the person here described, we cannot tell. The description was, assuredly, a very wonderful one. It began by comparing the promised Deliverer to a bud or tender shoot from a tree that had been cut down, and, apparently, dried up and dead; and it ended with ascribing to him the great and fearful name of Jehovah. Such a description could not fail to astonish them. While it awakened their admiration, it must also have filled them with reverence. But it was eminently calculated, also, to command their confidence, notwithstanding the mystery which, to their eye, hung over the person and character of the promised King. His being the offspring of David gave them the assurance of his tenderest sympathy in all that concerned the well-being of Israel and Judah; and his being Jehovah gave them a stronger assurance still, that nothing could be too difficult for him to accomplish, and that nothing would be left undone that was necessary for the well-being of his covenant people. They were, moreover, assured that the righteousness, power, and wisdom of this glorious person would be made available for securing the peace and prosperity of his people, inasmuch as he was to be their Righteousness,—or, in other words, he would make over to them all the benefits and blessings which, in virtue of his righteousness, were placed at his disposal. We cannot easily conceive what were the ideas which the Church in Jeremiah's day, and for ages after, entertained of the glorious person whose character, as here described, presented such a marvellous combination of humility and grandeur, of lowliness and of majesty. But we can conceive,—and it is delightful to dwell on the thought,—that in the midst of their tribulation, the promise must have brought to them great lightening of spirit and enlargement of heart. We can easily understand that, in the darkness which over-

whelmed them, when they were carried captive into a foreign land, and sat disconsolate there, hanging their harps on the willows by the rivers of Babylon, this promise would be to them like the dawn of the morning, which, though distant, was to bring them light and liberty. We can conceive, that while they beheld the house of David sinking into decay,—while they saw the goodly tree, which God's own hand had planted, cut down, withering and dying,—yet the promise would keep alive the hope that it would revive again, and that the tender shoot which was to spring from it would become a righteous Branch, even the Branch which God made strong for himself.

Nor was there any state of weakness and depression to which the Church might be reduced, where this promise was not fitted to keep alive their faith and hope, inasmuch as, from the very nature of the promise, it was in a time of great depression and weakness that its fulfilment was to take place. With what admiration, then, should we contemplate the provision which was thus made for sustaining the faith and ministering to the consolation of the people of God, during the long period that elapsed between the captivity of Judah and the coming of Christ,—a period of much disaster and suffering to the Church! And how delightful the thought, that during the dark and cloudy day, the hearts of God's people were comforted and refreshed by the assurance, that the days would come when the Lord would "raise unto David a righteous Branch," and a King should "reign and prosper," and should "execute judgment and justice in the earth;" that in his days Judah should be saved, and Israel should dwell safely; and that "this is his name whereby he should be called, THE LORD, OR JEHOVAH, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." And if we can thus enter into and sympathise with the feelings of the Church, the people of God in the old time, while they called to remembrance and pondered this precious promise, and prayed for its fulfilment, and felt their spirits refreshed and their hearts re-assured toward God in the sure hope that it would be fulfilled,—what should be our feeling in regard to it, when we reflect that it concerns us personally, as directly and as deeply as it concerned God's ancient covenant people! And how greatly have we the advantage over them! Not only has the promise been fulfilled, but, in the very fulfilment of it, its meaning has

been unfolded, as it was not and could not be to the Church of old. To them there must have been something dark and mysterious in the person and character of the promised Deliverer, when he was represented as clothed in the condition of humanity, and, at the same time, as inherently possessed of the attributes and majesty of the Godhead. The prophets themselves diligently sought to understand the meaning of their own predictions, when, moved by the Holy Ghost, they testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. And the Church at large, therefore, must have, in like manner, longed to know when and how such a wonderful combination of lowliness and majesty should appear in the same person,—how a shoot from the stem of Jesse should, at the same time, be Jehovah the righteousness of his people. To us the mystery has been revealed, so far as it can be to our limited understanding. The first part of the prediction has been fulfilled and explained in the history of the Saviour's birth, as the son of Mary, the humble and lowly descendant of the royal house of David; and what is all that we find recorded in the New Testament concerning the person, and character, and mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ, but just one great commentary on the concluding clause of this verse, "And this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD, OR JEHOVAH, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS?"

This passage, then, contains a very concise, but a very comprehensive summary of the whole scheme of redemption,—and a summary which the New Testament Scriptures have rendered as clear as it is comprehensive. It states, in a very definite and emphatic manner, the great principle on which that scheme rests,—namely, righteousness. It declares, what the whole tenor of Scripture testifies, that the only ground on which God can pass sentence of approbation on any of his intelligent creatures is perfect righteousness. As the Lawgiver and Judge, he must assert and vindicate the authority of his law, without concession and without compromise. If an intelligent creature, therefore, transgresses that law, he must fall under its condemnation; and, for any thing that he can do, under that condemnation he must remain. And herein lay the apparent impossibility of fallen man ever being restored again to the favour and fellowship of God. To the highest and holiest of

God's intelligent creatures, it must have appeared absolutely impossible. Indeed, the higher and holier that they were, the more hopeless must the condition of fallen man have appeared to them; for the more that they understood and revered the divine character, the more clearly would they see the inseparable connection between sin and punishment. If sinners of mankind think it an easy thing for God to pardon the guilty, it is only because they know nothing of God, and see little of the true character of sin as rebellion against him. It is very different with unfallen angels. They see wonders in the plan of man's redemption, into which they desire to look. Indeed, it is an unfathomable depth of love, and grace, and wisdom. If it be only on the ground of a perfect righteousness,—an unsinning obedience,—that God can look on an intelligent creature with approbation and favour, then, on this principle alone, man, having sinned, was for ever shut out from that favour and approbation. Nor would the obstacle that stood in the way of his restoration have been removed, even if he had been both able and willing to turn from sin, and, from the moment of his so turning, to yield a perfect and unsinning obedience. He was, in fact, neither willing nor able to do so; for he fell under the power as well as the condemnation of sin. But even if he had, it would not have availed, inasmuch as the authority of the law required to be asserted, and its honour vindicated, on account of sin already committed.

Two conditions, then, required to be fulfilled, to place fallen man on the ground of a perfect righteousness,—the only ground on which God can treat him with favour and approbation. The one of these conditions was the bearing of the punishment due to sin already committed,—the other was a perfect compliance with the demands of the law, in the way of obedience. The latter was impossible on the part of man himself; for, in consequence of his fall, he had become carnal, sold under sin. The former,—that is, bearing the punishment of sin,—would have been to give him over to the endless endurance of the divine displeasure. Man's condition, therefore, was helpless, hopeless, desperate, for any thing that created power could do. No man could save himself, or by any means redeem his brother. And it is in providing for the accomplishment of the seemingly impos-

sible object of restoring guilty, sinful men to favour and communion with God, that the plan of redemption has made known, even to principalities and powers in heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God. The ground of man's acceptance, as we have already seen, and the only ground, is a perfect righteousness; and that he could ever stand on such ground was to all appearance an inconceivable, an impossible thing. But it has been accomplished. In the covenant of grace between God the Father and God the Son, it was provided, on the one hand, that the Son should work out a perfect righteousness, in the name and on behalf of as many as the Father should give to him; and, on the other hand, that the Father, as Lawgiver and Judge, should accept the righteousness thus wrought out, as a satisfaction to the demands of his law, and should give to those for whom it was wrought out the benefit of it, as if it were their own. The Son of God, the second Person of the Godhead, thus undertook to fulfil the conditions necessary to place men again on the ground of a perfect righteousness before God,—that is to say, he undertook to bear the punishment due to sin already committed; and he undertook, moreover, to satisfy the demands of the divine law in the way of perfect obedience.

But in order to fulfil these conditions, it behoved him to be made under the law. As God, he was infinitely removed beyond the reach of suffering; and to become a sufferer, as man was condemned to suffer, it was necessary that he should assume man's nature, with its sinless infirmities and its sensibility to pain. Nor was it less necessary for him to assume human nature, in order to yield the perfect obedience which he undertook to yield in the name and on behalf of those for whom he agreed to suffer. His own inherent righteousness as God, the infinite purity and holiness of his nature as a divine person, could not be available to men, or reckoned to their account as their own. The obedience which was to profit them behoved to be a perfect obedience to the law which they had violated and dishonoured; and to yield this obedience, it was necessary that the Son of God should place himself in circumstances where he was required to fulfil all righteousness, in compliance with the demands of that law. It was thus needful, in every point of view, that he should become man, that he might satisfy the law, both by

suffering what was due to the guilty, and, at the same time, yielding such an obedience as the law would pronounce perfect. And this he accordingly undertook and accomplished; for he was "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." He bare the sins of his people "in his own body on the tree," and "suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring them to God." He was dealt with as if he had been the guiltiest, and in the eye of the law was reckoned such, —God having made to meet on him the iniquities of all his people; while, at the same time, he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." And having done and endured all this in the room and as the substitute of his people, he has thus become "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth;" or as the apostle, speaking in the name of believers, expresses it, he was made "sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" or as it is still more comprehensively expressed in the passage before us, "And this is his name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah our Righteousness."

Such is the plan of redemption,—the principle on which sinners are accepted and dealt with as righteous in the sight of God, as that principle is here stated, and more fully unfolded and explained in the New Testament. And I doubt not many will be ready not only to acquiesce in this statement as scriptural, but to conclude that none who are in the slightest degree acquainted even with the most elementary truths of the Gospel, the first principles of the oracles of God, and who profess to believe in Christ, can hesitate to acquiesce in it also, or can conceive of any other ground of acceptance with God than that which has now been stated. I wish I could think that all who profess to believe in Christ for salvation did thus clearly see, and understand, and approve of the one only ground of acceptance. But I fear it is far otherwise; I fear there are many professing Christians who have very indistinct or confused notions as to the principle on which men are justified, or received as righteous in the sight of God. While, in some sense, they do take Christ's obedience and death into account, and professedly rely on him, there is, at the same time, mixed up with this some

notion of the mercy of God, and of their own repentance and reformation, as forming part also of the reason or ground on which they are to be received into favour. And thus they cherish a double delusion. They virtually say, on the one hand, that the righteousness of Christ is not, alone and in itself, a sufficiently sure and solid ground whereon to rest; and they virtually assume, on the other, that God will in mere mercy accept of something of theirs, which in reality has nothing of righteousness in it, and which, at all events, they will themselves acknowledge to be very imperfect. Now, I know no consideration better fitted to dispel this delusion than the truth here stated, that Jehovah is his people's righteousness. Did they but believe and remember that no man, no intelligent and accountable creature, can approach God with acceptance, but on the ground of a perfect righteousness, they could not but feel that they have nothing to hope for from the mere mercy of God, and nothing in themselves on the strength of which they dared to look up to him. They must have a perfect righteousness,—a righteousness which the law, in its inflexible rectitude and rigour, will recognise as perfect. Until they are clothed with this righteousness, God cannot regard them with favour, or accept them as righteous.

And if they really believed this, how anxiously would they inquire whether it was possible that they could ever become possessed of such a righteousness! And with what gratitude, and gladness, and wonder, would they receive the gracious assurance, that God in his mercy had provided such a righteousness for them,—that it has actually been wrought out and perfected in their name and their behalf,—and that the righteousness of which they may reap the benefit is the righteousness of Jehovah himself! And if it be, to those who are earnest about their acceptance with God, a most precious and welcome truth, that such a righteousness has been provided, they will find a subject equally fitted to awaken their joy and call forth their gratitude in the manner, or the terms, if I may so express it, in which this righteousness is proposed to be made available to them,—that is, reckoned to their account, as if it were their own. It is offered to them without money and without price. It is made over to their acceptance as a free gift. It is God's own testimony

to them, that he has given them eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. And the moment that they believe this, and, with heart and soul, close with and accept the offer, the perfect righteousness which Christ has wrought out becomes theirs. And yet it is at this point that they will often hesitate and doubt, before they cordially embrace Christ and rest upon him. And it were not wonderful, perhaps, that when they first begin to discern the divine generosity, the unsearchable depth of divine grace, in thus making over to them the perfect righteousness of Christ to be theirs,—I say it were not, perhaps, wonderful, when they first perceive this, that they should doubt, and be ready to say, It is too great, and too glorious to be true; just as it is said of the disciples, that when they were told that their Lord was risen, they "believed not for joy." But there are often, I fear, other grounds of doubting than this. Self-righteousness is one of the many delusions and lamentable inconsistencies which characterise man's fallen nature; and even when sinners are convinced that they cannot work out a perfect righteousness for themselves, they will cling to the idea that they must do something to entitle or to qualify them for receiving and profiting by that which Christ has wrought out for them. But, all the while, it is offered to them, nay, pressed upon their acceptance, without money and without price,—and if they receive it, it must be as a gift; if they are justified, it must be "freely," "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" for "by grace" are they "saved through faith," and that not of themselves; "it is the gift of God."

But if it be wonderful that a perfect righteousness should have been wrought out on behalf of those who had no righteousness of their own, and must, therefore, have perished for ever,—and if it be wonderful, also, that this righteousness is freely made over to them, and becomes theirs the moment they accept it,—is it not, if possible, still more wonderful that any creature, not to say a guilty and polluted creature, should have such a righteousness imputed to him, and that he should be dealt with as if it were his own? It is not enough to say of it that it is a perfect righteousness. This is true of the righteousness of unfallen angels. They have never sinned. Their obedience, from the first hour of their existence, has been a cheerful, a uniform, an unsinning

obedience. They have obeyed the commandments of the Lord, "hearkening unto the voice of his word," and doing his pleasure. According, therefore, to their capacity, and the extent of their powers and faculties, their righteousness is perfect; and while they approach God with reverence, covering their faces with their wings, they approach him also with confidence, knowing that as the righteous God he will award to them what he has inseparably connected with righteousness, namely, the enjoyment of his own favour and fellowship. But perfect as their righteousness is in itself, and sufficient though it be for their appearing with approbation in the presence of God, and for being regarded by him with complacency, still it is but the righteousness of mere creatures, who will themselves acknowledge that they have done only what it was their duty to do. How glorious, how exceeding glorious in comparison is that righteousness in which redeemed sinners of mankind stand clothed in the presence of God, and are accepted in his sight! And how marvellous that any should seek to unite with this white and spotless robe the filthy rags of their own righteousness, as if they would thereby secure more of God's approbation and complacent regard! That robe in which Christ would array them infinitely exceeds in glory and beauty any thing in which the highest and holiest of God's intelligent creatures ever stood arrayed in his presence. It is the righteousness of a divine person, even God's own righteousness. It has not only satisfied the divine law in a twofold manner,—that is, by bearing the punishment which the law awards to transgression, and fulfilling what it requires in the way of obedience; but it has magnified the law and made it honourable.

And what does not such a righteousness deserve at the hand of the Lawgiver and Judge in the way of reward? It is not enough to say that it is sufficient for the justification of every sinful child of Adam to whom it is imputed, and that Christ has redeemed his people from the curse of the law, having bought them with his own blood. There is no blessing which he is not entitled to claim on their behalf. We have already seen how full of consolation the promise we have been considering must have been to the suffering Church of the old time, when they were assured that the days would come when the people of God would participate in all the benefits and blessings which the

promised King of David's house would, in virtue of his righteousness, be entitled and authorised to dispense. These blessings or benefits, it is true, are set forth as temporal privileges; for the promise was, "In those days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely." But temporal blessings did not exhaust the promise. These were employed, generally, under the old dispensation, to represent or figure forth all the blessings of the great salvation, and by the true Church they were valued not merely on their own account, but also and especially as tokens of the divine favour,—as channels through which he conveyed to them the assurance of his love. And such must have been, in a peculiar manner, their view of this promise, when they were assured that the righteous King, under whom they were to enjoy prosperity and peace, should be called, JEHOVAH THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS. And how fully have the largest and brightest of the anticipations of the Old Testament Church been realised in the representations which the New Testament gives of the privileges of believers,—of the grace provided for them here, and of the glory prepared for them hereafter! Not only has Jehovah their Righteousness procured for them acceptance with God, and restoration to the blessedness which they had forfeited and lost by their apostasy; he has provided for their exaltation to a state of honour and distinction, which we do not find ascribed even to principalities and powers in heavenly places. It was his prayer for them before he left this earth, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." The import of this prayer is more fully brought out by the apostle when he says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." And lastly, another apostle has said of himself, and of all true believers, "Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

XLVIII.

THE NEW COVENANT.

JEREMIAH XXXI. 31-34.

When the Scriptures represent God as entering into or making a covenant with man, it is plain that the word "covenant" cannot be understood in precisely the same sense as in a transaction between man and man. When applied to human transactions, the word "covenant" signifies a voluntary contract, or agreement, between parties, whereby they become mutually bound to perform certain stipulations; and in all such cases, it is presumed of the covenanting parties that if they are not actually, in all respects, on an equal footing, they are at least equally competent to fulfil their part of the agreement, and that upon doing so, they are entitled to demand, as a matter of right, that the corresponding part shall in like manner be performed. But it is obvious that in this sense of the word, there never could be a covenant between God and his fallen guilty creatures of mankind. If he ever condescended to transact with them at all,—if he made any proposal to them that was to be for their benefit or advantage,—it could only be in the way of a promise, originating in his own good pleasure, which, when fulfilled, or carried into effect, could only be an act of sovereign grace, to which they had originally no claim, and for which they could render no equivalent. And if he did make to them any such proposal or promise, they were not at liberty to reject or to acquiesce in it as they might think proper, and as they might do in dealing with one another. The

proposal, or promise, coming from God their Creator, their Preserver, the Proprietor of them, and theirs, and all things, laid upon them an absolute and unalterable obligation to accept of the proposal, and to believe and confide in the promise, whatever were the terms on which God's gracious purpose was to be carried into effect. When God, therefore, is graciously pleased to speak, as in this passage, of making a covenant with men, such a covenant differs essentially from a covenant betwixt man and man, and that in two particulars:—First, they have nothing, absolutely nothing, that they can do as an equivalent for what God proposes or promises to do for them. And, secondly, when God does make a proposal or promise to them, they are not entitled to deal with it as they might think themselves entitled to deal with a proposal from their fellow-men, considering whether it is pleasing, and is likely to be profitable to them, and then closing with or rejecting it, according as they think it will or will not be so. By the very law of their being, they are bound or laid under an obligation, stronger than any act of their own could lay them, to acquiesce in any proposal and to confide in any promise that God may be pleased to make to them. But it is this very consideration that gives to the promise which God is pleased to make to men the character of a covenant transaction. If he proposes or promises to bestow upon them a benefit or blessing in a certain way, and on certain terms, pledging his faithfulness and truth to bestow the blessing on those who believe his promise and acquiesce in his terms, and if they are bound by an obligation, which they cannot throw off, so to believe and acquiesce, then such a transaction does partake of the nature of a covenant. Nothing, indeed, on the part of men, is in any sense the procuring cause of the blessing or benefit bestowed. Their believing the promise, and their concurring in the terms or manner of its accomplishment, were not the reason why the promise was made, nor are they, in any degree, a return or equivalent for the fulfilment of it. The proposal originated in sovereign grace, and by grace is carried into effect. Still, on the ground already stated, such a proposal or promise partakes of the nature of a covenant transaction, and is, accordingly, so called in Scripture. Thus, when God was graciously pleased to promise to Noah that the earth should never again

be destroyed by a flood, but that, "while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease," this promise, which was altogether unconditional, and of free grace, is expressly and repeatedly called a covenant: "I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth." In like manner, the promise made to Abraham, that the land of Canaan should belong to his seed for an inheritance, is designated a covenant: "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." And, in the passage before us, the new covenant which God was to make, in the last days, with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, is itself simply a promise,—a promise of rich spiritual blessings: "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Such is the Scripture meaning of the word "covenant" when applied to a direct transaction between God and man. It signifies simply a proposal or promise on his part, originating in his sovereign grace; and it becomes a covenant, or partakes of the nature of a covenant, because, on the one hand, men are bound to acquiesce in that proposal, and will be held bound to do so whether they will or no; and because, on the other hand, God graciously pledges his faithfulness to bestow the promised blessing on those who do so acquiesce. But here the question presents itself, How could God, the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, directly make any such proposal or promise to sinful men as could be called a covenant, whereby God was bound to fulfil his part of the engagement? I say in reply, God never did and never could directly enter into a covenant engagement with the fallen and guilty children of men. Nay, he never could have made any gracious proposal or promise to them at all, if there had not been a real covenant, in the strictest sense of the word, whereby provision was made for the full vindication of the honour of his law, so that he could not only exercise

forbearance, and mercy, and long-suffering patience, towards mankind at large, but even propose to deal with them in the way of a covenant transaction, and to pledge his faithfulness for the fulfilment of all that he proposed or promised to those who should believe his word and acquiesce in his proposal. This real covenant was the covenant of grace,—a covenant which had been entered into from eternity,—and between parties who were on a footing of perfect equality, even God the Father and God the Son. It was, moreover, a voluntary engagement on the part of both. It originated in the love and sovereign grace of the Father, who was willing to save sinners on terms and in a way consistent with his character and perfections as the great Lawgiver and Judge; and the Son willingly undertook to fulfil the terms or conditions that were necessary to carry out the Father's gracious designs. On behalf of those who were given him to be redeemed, he fully satisfied the demands of law and justice. From the beginning, even from eternity, he engaged to do so; and in the fulness of time he came into the world, and fulfilled his engagement. By so doing he acquired a right or property in his people,—in those for whom he obeyed, and suffered, and died. Hence he says, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." But those whom the Father had given him were to be gathered out of all the generations of men from the beginning to the end of the world; and, therefore, from the beginning, all the successive generations of men were to be dealt with in the way of mercy and forbearance. In every successive age of the past there have been some, greater or less in number, and in every future age there will be some of those who in the eternal covenant were given to Christ to be redeemed; and, therefore, for the ingathering of these, a respite is granted to all, so that all, even the finally impenitent, are endured with much long-suffering.

The covenant of grace, then, lies at the foundation of every gracious proposal or promise which God has ever condescended to make to any of the children of men. But for that covenant there never could have been any friendly communication between the righteous Lawgiver and the guilty transgressors of his

law. The existence of this covenant was first announced in the garden of Eden immediately after the fall, when it was declared that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. The announcement was renewed from time to time, as when it was said to Abraham, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed;" and all the ordinances which God appointed in Old Testament times, from the first institution of sacrifice in the days of Adam downwards, were designed to typify or prefigure the nature and blessed effects of what Christ undertook to do and endure, as the fulfilment of his covenant engagement with the Father. And from the beginning, even from Adam's time, some of the children of men, in every age, became parties in this covenant,—not, indeed, directly,—that is to say, the covenant was not made with them directly, for they could not have fulfilled the conditions of it. But some in all ages have, nevertheless, become parties in that covenant, simply by believing and resting on Him who had undertaken to fulfil all conditions in their name and on their behalf; so that they became partakers of all the blessings which flow from Christ's mediatorial work,—from his having satisfied the demands of law and justice,—and from his having procured for them the reward of a perfect righteousness, as if they had procured and purchased it for themselves; yea, in an immeasurably higher degree than their own unsinning obedience ever would have procured. They who come to Christ shall not only have life,—the life which they had forfeited and lost,—but they shall "have it more abundantly." And this is the covenant in which it does most nearly concern us all to become parties. There have been other covenant transactions between God and men,—that is, promises on the part of God which laid obligations on men, binding them to render him the homage due for his gracious promises. But men may have reaped the benefit of these promises or covenant transactions, while they had no interest in the one covenant which alone secures to men eternal life. For example, all of us are at this moment enjoying the blessings of the promise which God made to Noah, when he said that he would no more destroy the earth by a flood as he had done. This promise was given unconditionally; and, moreover, God was pleased to make it, and to call it a covenant,—that is, he pledged his faithfulness that he

would fulfil what he had promised,—and appointed the rainbow as a sign or confirmation of his covenant: "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." By this gracious promise and pledge, men were and are bound to recognise, and acknowledge, and do homage to God, as the proprietor and sovereign ruler of the universe,—the author of all good,—the bountiful benefactor of every living thing. Need I say what countless multitudes, in every age since the days of Noah, have broken this covenant, and cast off the obligation which God's gracious promise laid upon them? May I not rather ask how few, how very few, have recognised and acknowledged that obligation? Yet mankind at large continue to this hour to experience the faithfulness of God's promise,—the stability of his covenant; and yet, while they do so, they may be utter "strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."

The subject of these remarks is very fully illustrated by the statement of the prophet regarding the covenant made with Israel, when God "took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt." We have already seen that God was pleased to make a new announcement of the covenant of grace to Abraham, when he said unto him, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed;" thus declaring not only that a Saviour, the seed of the woman, should one day appear, but that he should be born of the family of Abraham. But besides this renewed and more definite promise concerning Christ, the patriarch received another promise, subordinate to and intended to prepare the way for the fulfilment of the other, namely, that Abraham's seed should receive the land of Canaan for an inheritance. This promise, of course, from the very nature of things, could not be immediately carried into effect, and indeed the patriarch himself was expressly told that it would not be fulfilled for more than four hundred years. His posterity were to be for a season as strangers even in the land of promise, and afterwards were to sojourn and be grievously oppressed in the land of Egypt. In due time, however, the promise was fulfilled. Notwithstanding

the oppressive measures employed to diminish or keep down their numbers, they multiplied, and grew, and became a great people; and, at the appointed time, God visited them, and "took them by the hand to bring them up out of the land of Egypt." And in doing so he laid them under a covenant engagement to believe and obey him. He did not, indeed, prescribe to them any conditions to be fulfilled by them as the price of their deliverance. The promise had been given in the exercise of sovereign grace many ages before they were born, and it was carried into effect by an act of sovereign power without any help of theirs. But they were not at liberty to accept or refuse at pleasure the gracious proposal contained in the promise. They were bound to believe God's word, and to avail themselves of the way of deliverance which he opened up for them, and to obey his voice in all things; and if they had refused to do so, they would have been guilty of breaking his covenant. This obligation lay upon them, independently of any formal covenant transaction requiring their acquiescence. And this they were told in a very solemn and emphatic manner at a future period, when the Lord spake to them on Mount Sinai all the words of the ten commandments, as the law which he held them bound to obey.

That law was not given to them in Egypt, nor was their obedience to it required as a condition on which they were to be delivered from the house of bondage. Their deliverance was the work of sovereign grace and power, without any fulfilment of conditions on their part. The work of their deliverance had been carried on, not only without their aid, but against their murmuring and their remonstrances; for, in the bitterness of their bondage, they were ready to reject God's gracious interposition on their behalf, and to say, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians." But having delivered them from their oppressors,—having brought them up out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage,—and having conducted them to a considerable distance on their way to Canaan, miraculously providing for their support,—God was pleased to announce to them what he required at their hand in the way of obedience, and what they were already under an unalterable obligation to render to him, as their Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land

of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," therefore, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Even then the ten commandments were not addressed to them as the terms of a covenant to which they might or might not give their consent as they pleased. The law was given forth as an explicit declaration of what they were before bound to obey, as if they had already entered into a covenant engagement with God. And they did then expressly do so; for when the Lord had spoken all the words of the ten commandments, the people came near unto Moses, and said, "If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. . . . . Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it." And to this declaration on the part of Israel, God said, "I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken."

There was thus given to the obligation laid upon Israel, by God's gracious promise to them, and by the fulfilment of that promise, the character of a formal, solemn, covenant transaction, in which they not only were bound to acquiesce, but did in fact really acquiesce. And on their steadfastness in this covenant was to depend their continued and peaceable possession of Canaan; for while they were threatened, on the one hand, that if they did not remember the commandments and statutes of the Lord to keep them and to do them, they should be given up to the famine, the pestilence, and the sword, and, finally, would be carried captive among the heathen, they were assured, on the other hand, that if they hearkened unto the voice of the Lord their God, he would put the fear of them and the dread of them on all the nations that were round about them. But it is always to be remembered, of course, that the law, thus spoken to Israel from Mount Sinai, was not given to them as the condition on which to obtain eternal life. That was impossible. The law of the ten commandments is the law of eternal truth and righteousness, requiring perfect obedience, or pronouncing a curse on every one who continueth not in all things written therein to do them. It was from the curse of this very law that Christ came to redeem men; and, therefore, by the deeds of this law no man could be justified. The law, therefore, was

not given to Israel that by obedience thereto they might have eternal life. That life was held out to them on a ground altogether different, even on the covenant of grace, announced first in the garden of Eden, afterwards renewed to Abraham, and, under the Mosaic economy, set forth very vividly in the daily sacrifices, and other rites of that dispensation, especially in the great annual atonement which was made for the whole congregation of Israel, when the high priest entered in within the veil, carrying with him the blood of atonement and incense, thereby procuring permission to come forth from the presence of God, and to bless the people of Israel. And if thus the law could not give eternal life to the people of Israel, so neither could it secure them in the continued and quiet possession of Canaan, if that had depended on their perfect obedience to the law. And why, then, it may be asked, was it given? "It was added," says the apostle, in answer to this very question,—"it was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." It was given to keep Israel in mind of what they were under an eternal obligation to do. It was given for the purpose of teaching them the knowledge of sin,—that is, showing them the true nature, demerit, and deformity of sin. And the final gracious purpose of all this was to convince them of the hopelessness of working out a righteousness for themselves, either for procuring eternal life, or even maintaining their title to the temporal blessings of Canaan, and thus to shut them up to a simple reliance on and an earnest longing expectation for the coming of the promised Saviour, whose mediatorial work was most vividly presented to them in the ordinances of the ceremonial law.

The Sinai covenant, or law of the ten commandments, must thus have been a very heavy burden on the conscience of all the humble, devout, reflecting men in Israel; for such men could never forget that they were under a covenant engagement to obey all its commands and fulfil all its requirements. They who thus felt would be the most anxious to yield a perfect obedience to it, feeling and acknowledging that it was in all things holy, and just, and good. But feeling also that they were sinning against and coming short of its demands, their only refuge would be in the ordinances of the ceremonial law, wherein they

saw an atonement for guilt,—the symbol or the type of the work of Him who, as the seed of the woman, was one day to bruise the serpent's head. And if Israel as a nation or people had thus felt,—if they had seen and acknowledged that "the law was holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good," and that they were under a covenant engagement to obey it,—and if, under a deep conviction of their utter inability to satisfy its demands, they had cast themselves on the grace and mercy of God, as revealed in the promises and types whereby he had set forth Christ to them,—then not only would they have continued in the full and undisturbed possession of Canaan, but they would have been heirs of a richer and still better inheritance, even the heavenly inheritance that fadeth not away. They would thus have been steadfast in God's covenant; for thus would that covenant, I mean the Sinai covenant, have accomplished its great purpose, that of shutting them up unto "the faith which should afterwards be revealed," being their "schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ," that they "might be justified by faith." But they did not so feel in regard to the law as given to them from Mount Sinai. They were not steadfast in God's covenant. They brake that covenant. And this breach of the covenant did not consist merely in their having failed perfectly to keep the ten commandments. A remedy was provided, in the institution of sacrifice and of the office of the priesthood, for those who acknowledged their obligation, but felt their inability so to obey the law. But Israel broke the covenant by disavowing their covenant engagement altogether. So far from being thereby shut up to the faith that was afterwards to be revealed, they cast off the authority of the law, denying its binding obligation. They forsook God, which made them, and lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation.

It was thus that Israel, as a nation, by falling into idolatry, and by a presumptuous high-handed violation of all the ten commandments, brake the covenant which God made with them, "in the day that he took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt." I say, Israel as a nation; for at every period there were some to whom the law did prove a "schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ,"—shutting them up to "the faith that should afterwards be revealed." But it was with

Israel as a nation that the covenant was made; and as a nation they brake it, and so forfeited the temporal blessings which it promised, while, at the same time, it did not produce in them the gracious purpose which it was fitted and designed to do, that of shutting them up to faith in the promised Saviour. But in the passage under consideration a new covenant is promised, —not according to that which God made with Israel "in the day that he took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt," and in which he promised them the possession of a temporal inheritance. In reference to this new covenant, the apostle says that "Christ hath obtained a more excellent ministry" than that of the priests under the law, "by how much also he is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." This new covenant, then, is no other than the covenant of grace, as fully revealed by the manifestation of Christ the Mediator. In one sense, this covenant cannot be called new, as compared with the Sinai covenant; for we have already seen that it preceded and actually constituted the foundation of every gracious communication which God ever vouchsafed to the children of men. The existence of this covenant was announced from the beginning; and from the beginning it was available for the salvation of all who looked forward by faith to Him who had undertaken to fulfil its conditions. But it was new, inasmuch as it was only by the death of Christ that it was formally ratified and confirmed, and set forth to men as a solemn covenant transaction. And it is a new and a better covenant, as contrasted with that of Sinai, inasmuch as it is established on better promises. The covenant made with Israel, on the day that they came out of Egypt, and afterwards solemnly ratified at Sinai, did in itself secure for those who were parties to it, that is, to Israel as a nation, only temporal blessings,—namely, the permanent and peaceable possession of Canaan,—and that only if they were steadfast in that covenant. But the new covenant was established on the promise of an eternal inheritance; the conditions necessary for procuring the possession of that inheritance were fulfilled by Christ as Mediator; and to as many as become parties to the covenant, the permanent and uninterrupted enjoyment of all its blessings is infallibly secured. These blessings are very concisely, but very comprehensively

stated: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

There seems to be here, also, in the enumeration of the blessings of the new covenant, a contrast with those of the old. In the Sinai covenant, the law was written on tables of stone, and presented to Israel as the law which they were under a covenant engagement to obey; but the authority of which they cast off and disowned. In regard to those who become parties to the new covenant, the law is written in their heart,—their mind is assimilated to God's mind,—their will is brought into accordance with his will,—the law is to them a law of love, the expressed will of their heavenly Father, which they delight to do,—God is their God, and they are his people. All this was, no doubt, true of some, at least, in every age of the Mosaic dispensation; but not of all who were parties to the Sinai covenant, nor in virtue thereof. That covenant, indeed, as the announcement of God's eternal and unchangeable law, was in itself the ministration of death. But the new covenant is the ministration of the Spirit, as the apostle sets forth in the 3d chapter of his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, where he says, "If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones was glorious, ... how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?" And the nature of this ministration of the Spirit he explains, with a reference to the Corinthians themselves, when he says, "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." The law was, to those of Israel who disowned their covenant engagement to obey it, the sentence or ministration of death; and even in regard to those who acknowledged their engagement or obligation, but who felt their utter inability to fulfil it, the law must have laid a heavy burden on their conscience, from which they could find no relief but by looking to the promised Saviour, as typified in the ordinance of sacrifice and the office of the priesthood. But under the new covenant,—the covenant of grace fully ratified and made manifest,—there is no longer any such bondage. The demands of the law have been satisfied to the uttermost. To those who are parties in the covenant, that law has become

a law of love, written in their hearts "with the Spirit of the living God;" "and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

The momentous question with us, then, is, Are we interested in, or have we become parties to, this covenant? We must be all held as professing to have some hope, at least, that such is our condition, for we all profess to believe in Christ; and if we do really believe in him, then we are among the number of those for whom, as their representative and surety, he came under a covenant engagement to the Father, the great Lawgiver and Judge, to satisfy all the demands of the law, so that God "might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." But do we really believe in Christ? Do we heartily approve of God's method of saving sinners, as worthy of his character and perfections, and infinitely worthy of our cordial acceptation? And have we unreservedly closed with and embraced him as he is freely offered to us in the Gospel, in all his offices, as our prophet, priest, and king? We ought to know whether we have done so, just as we know in regard to other matters whether we have embraced an offer or proposal that has been made to us. But if we are in doubt, and at the same time are anxious to ascertain our true state, we may find much to help us in our inquiry, in the view which is here given of the blessings of the new covenant. It is not a lengthened enumeration of these blessings. It is a very concise, though, as we have seen, a very comprehensive summary of them; and it sets them forth as they are experimentally felt and practically exhibited by all who are interested in the new covenant: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." This is not said merely to be the effect of their having an interest in the covenant. It is declared to be the very covenant itself,—the very blessing which is promised. If, then, we be parties to this covenant, we must in some measure or degree be partakers of this blessing. To have the law of God put into our mind, and written in our heart, so that we may know God, as the Lord God merciful and gracious, forgiving our iniquity, and remembering our sin no more, is the benefit or blessing which is secured and made over to all who believe in Jesus. Being delivered from the condemning power and curse of the law, it becomes to us the law

of liberty, written by the Spirit on our hearts, constraining us by love to serve God without fear, in holiness and in righteousness before him. It is only in so far, then, as we are brought under the influence of this law, and into conformity to it, that we enjoy the blessings of the new covenant. And how anxious, therefore, should we be to have growing evidence in ourselves that we have been "born again," that we have "passed from death unto life," that we are "in Christ," and have become "new creatures," that "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God."

XLIX.

THE NEW COVENANT.

JEREMIAH XXXI. 34–40.

THIS passage is a continuation of the gracious promise contained in the preceding context. There it is said, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt." The new covenant thus promised was the covenant of grace, as fully and clearly manifested in the person and finished work of Christ the Mediator. That covenant had been announced from the beginning in the promise of a Saviour; and the promise was from time to time renewed. The provision which it made for the pardon of the guilty, by the substitution of the promised Saviour in their room, bearing the punishment of their guilt, had also been set forth in the ordinance of sacrifice. And the covenant, though thus but partially revealed, was available for the justification of all who looked by faith to the promised Redeemer. But it was only when Christ actually appeared that the covenant was fully manifested, being only then actually ratified and confirmed by the shedding of his blood; and on this ground it is called a new covenant. Moreover, under the old dispensation of the Church, the people of Israel were brought under a covenant engagement to obey the law as delivered from Mount Sinai, and written on tables of stone,—the law which

was in substance the covenant of works, requiring perfect obedience on pain of death. This law "was added," the apostle says, "because of transgressions;" or, as he has elsewhere expressed it, "the law entered that the offence might abound,"—that it might be manifested in all its extent and sinfulness,—that it might appear exceeding sinful,—that men might by the law have the knowledge of sin, and so, being convinced of the hopelessness of obtaining life by the law, seeing that it wrought death in them, might be "shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed," the law being their schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ. Thus, though the covenant of grace was made known to the Old Testament Church by promise and type, and was available for the justification of all who believed, yet they were held in bondage by the Sinai covenant, feeling their obligation to a law which must be satisfied, but which they could not satisfy. But from this bondage the Church under the new dispensation has been set free. Christ has satisfied the demands of that law, even to the uttermost, on behalf of his people,—not, indeed, to the effect, or for the purpose of setting them free from it as a rule of life; for it is alike their duty and their interest, nay, essential to their happiness, to be in all things conformed to it, as the good and holy will of God. It was, in fact, for the very purpose of bringing them into this state that Christ satisfied the demands of the law in their room, delivering them from its condemning power, that they might yield to it the obedience of gratitude and love. It is no longer presented to them written on stones, the ministration of death, but it is written on the heart by the Spirit of the Lord. God is their God, and they are his people, for they become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

And if by the new covenant foretold in the preceding context, the people of God were to be delivered from bondage, so in like manner they were thereby to be brought out of a state of comparative ignorance and darkness. Under the old dispensation, Christ was but dimly revealed in prophecy and in type; and, therefore, God the Father, whom Christ came to reveal, must also have been but partially known. He was, indeed, known to Israel as the Lord their God, who had brought them "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;" nay, he had pro-

claimed himself to Moses, and by Moses to the people of Israel, as "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." But to this proclamation was added, "and that will by no means clear the guilty." And here lay the mystery. How could this last declaration, namely, that God would "by no means clear the guilty," be reconciled with his being a gracious God, "forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin?" I do not say that those who had spiritual discernment to see in the sacrifices which they offered a type or pledge of the one great atoning sacrifice, might not perceive that in requiring such an atonement at the hand of the promised Saviour, God was true to his word in not clearing the guilty, inasmuch as he treated that Saviour as if he had been the guiltiest of the guilty, while, at the same time, he was gracious to sinners, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin. But though I doubt not the true people of God under the old dispensation were in some measure gifted with this spiritual discernment, still it must have been a very wonderful thing to them that God could be a gracious and sin-forgiving God, while at the same time he would by no means clear the guilty. And with the burden of the Sinai covenant on their conscience, it must have been not only a wonderful, but at times a very perplexing thing to them. No doubt their spiritual discernment was quickened, and they found enlargement and relief, when the high priest went in, on the great day of yearly atonement, into the holy of holies, and presented the blood and the incense on their behalf, and came out again, and blessed them in the name of the Lord. But though on such occasions they were greatly relieved, and doubtless returned unto their houses "joyful and glad of heart," because God had accepted their sacrifice and burnt-offering, yet they were not thereby so "purged" as to have "no more conscience of sins." They had not yet seen the one great atoning sacrifice that could alone give them a full and permanent sense of forgiveness. On the contrary, the remembrance of sin, the sense of sin on the conscience, was perpetually coming back upon them. The solemn declaration, "I will by no means clear the guilty," still sounded in their ears, involving a great mystery; and we can easily conceive that they who "feared the Lord, and

that thought upon his name," and amidst all their darkness clung to his memorial as "the Lord God merciful and gracious," would speak "often one to another," if so that they might help one another to know the Lord in his wonderful character as "a just God and a Saviour." When, therefore, Christ appeared "once in the end of the world, . . . to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,"—when the Lord laid on him the iniquity of all his people, showing that he was the righteous God, who would "by no means clear the guilty,"—and when it was declared that by Jesus, whom God raised from the dead, "all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses,"—then the mystery was revealed,—God was fully and clearly manifested as "a just God and a Saviour." And when with this clearer revelation there was also given larger communications of the Spirit than had been vouchsafed to the Church under the old dispensation, then was fulfilled the promise, "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

The statement in the concluding clause of this verse is a very remarkable one, "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." The reason, then, of their knowing the Lord, or the way in which they come to know him, is declared to be his forgiving their iniquity, and his remembering their sin no more. And this declaration is a beautiful explanation of what we have already seen was, and must have been, to a great extent, an unexplained mystery in the Old Testament Church. They knew that God was "the Lord God merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin;" but they knew him also as "a jealous God," the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, who could "by no means clear the guilty;" and to reconcile these two characters was the difficulty under which they laboured. But the removal of this difficulty is here foretold as a matter of blessed experience on their part. They were to know God as freely, fully, and finally forgiving their iniquity, so as to remember their sin no more,—not because he was to re-

linquish or compromise any one demand of his holy and righteous law, but because, by setting forth his Son as "a propitiation through faith in his blood," he was "to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins," "that he might be just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." It is thus declared that to know God savingly is to know him as a sin-forgiving God; or, in other words, that forgiveness is the first blessing, and the ground-work of all the other blessings which his people receive at his hand. It is here, indeed, put last in the enumeration of the blessings of the new covenant; but it is put in such a way as to show that it is the first, inasmuch as it is declared to be the reason, as it were, of all the others. That is to say, it is through the well-grounded hope of forgiveness that believers are brought experimentally to know that they have an interest in all the other blessings of the new and everlasting covenant.

The word "for," in the last clause of the verse, obviously refers not merely to the immediately preceding clause, but to all that goes before concerning the new covenant, as promised in the 31st verse. The promise was, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people;" and "they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them." But all this necessarily implied that they were pardoned, reconciled unto God, brought from under the sentence of condemnation that had passed upon them as transgressors of the law. So long as this sentence stood against them, it presented an insuperable barrier against the communication to them of any of the spiritual blessings here enumerated. While under the curse of the law, the law could not be written in their heart as a thing in which they delighted,—God could not be their God, nor could they be his people. The first step towards their becoming so was an act of forgiveness on the part of God, whereby he removed the obstacle which must have for ever prevented any friendly intercourse between him and them. And, accordingly, he explains how it was that he could impart to them all the other blessings of the new covenant: "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." And this declaration was especially seasonable, and must have been peculiarly precious to the faithful remnant of God's people in Jeremiah's time. Judah,

as a nation, was about to be cast off, and apparently disinherited, by being carried captive into Babylon, and this in consequence of their obstinate perseverance in a course of disobedience and rebellion, notwithstanding the remonstrances of the prophets whom God sent in succession to admonish and to warn them. And what would the believing few be ready to conclude in the certain prospect of such a judgment, but that the covenant between God and his people was to be for ever dissolved,—that they had forfeited, and were about to lose beyond the hope of recovery, all the blessings promised unto their fathers,—and that the curse denounced by Moses was to be executed even to the uttermost, in their being destroyed from off the good land which the Lord their God had given them. If the sin of Judah was such as to dissolve their covenant relation to God, it might appear to them that the same sin would render it impossible that the relation could ever again be renewed, and that, therefore, being once cast off, they must be cast off for ever. They must have felt that a free and full forgiveness was necessary either for their being retained in their covenant relation to God, or for their being restored to that relation if it were broken off; and the assurance, therefore, of such a forgiveness was necessary to the deriving any comfort even from the promise of a new covenant. And God was graciously pleased to give them this assurance: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

We can thus easily conceive how the declaration of a free and full forgiveness was necessary to afford the Church, in Jeremiah's day, any comfort in the prospect of the terrible judgment that was about to overtake Judah and Jerusalem. Without such a declaration, they could not have derived any consolation even from the promise or announcement of a new covenant; for unless they were freely forgiven,—unless their sin were no more remembered,—they could not have conceived it possible that they could ever be reinstated in a covenant relation to God. But so it is with the Church and with individual believers still. Forgiveness is still the first thing, the beginning of that process by which sinners are brought into the full enjoyment of all the blessings

and privileges of the new covenant. It is the first thing in the divine procedure towards bringing sinners within the bond of the covenant; for they were chosen in Christ "before the foundation of the world," being "predestinated unto the adoption of children," to be in due time called into the fellowship of his Son. They were thus forgiven in the purpose of God from the beginning, and it is because they were so that he provides the means and appoints the way whereby they are brought to repent, and are persuaded to believe, and enabled to turn unto God, and receive so as to possess and enjoy the forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among them that are sanctified. And as pardon or forgiveness is thus the first of God's gracious acts towards those who are to be heirs of eternal life, so the declaration of this pardon or forgiveness is the first thing that is essential towards their turning unto God, and becoming partakers of everlasting consolation and good hope. Without the proclamation of a free and full forgiveness through the blood of the cross, there could be no ground of hope for sinners, and nothing, therefore, to disarm their natural enmity against God. Convictions of sin, without any hope of forgiveness, would serve only to awaken and strengthen that enmity; and the deeper the convictions, the more bitter would the enmity become. But the very essence of the Gospel, that which constitutes its sum and substance, is the proclamation of a free forgiveness, so that, at the very outset, it provides against even the guiltiest of men sinking into despair under their convictions of sin.

This proclamation of pardon is not designed, indeed, to preserve men from despair, by stifling their convictions, or making them think more lightly of sin. On the contrary, it is both designed and fitted to deepen these convictions, and with all true penitents it will have the effect of doing so. But as soon as the hope of pardon is awakened in their minds, the character or nature of their convictions will be changed. Formerly they were mere feelings of terror, awakened by the thought that they had sinned against a God too righteous and holy to pass by their sin without condemning them, and too powerful to leave them any hope of being able to resist or evade his infliction of the punishment which they deserved. The effect, therefore, of such feelings of slavish fear could only be to harden their hearts

against God, as an unreasonably rigorous and austere master, and so to rouse into activity the enmity of their carnal mind, or to extort from them a feigned submission, a hypocritical service, whereby to soften, at least, if not to avert his displeasure. And while they thus flattered themselves that, by such a submission and such a service, they might mitigate or turn away from themselves the anger of the Lord, they would labour, at the same time, to palliate their offences,—to think and speak of them by the soft name of infirmities, by which, in common with all other men, they were encompassed,—and thus to persuade themselves that they had not so much ground to fear the consequences of their sins as their conscience had at first suggested. But when they are made to see and understand that they have sinned against grace, and love, and mercy, as well as against rectitude and truth, —that God is willing still to forgive all their iniquity, great and aggravating as it is, and that to do so consistently with his character, and with the principles of his righteous government, he sent his Son to bear their iniquity and atone for their guilt,— when they begin to see and feel the reality of all this, their convictions of sin become unspeakably more profound than they were before. But these convictions will no longer strengthen and call forth enmity against God. While the hope of forgiveness preserves them from despair, one of the considerations that does most deeply humble and abase them in their own eyes will be, that they had been enemies to God in their heart by wicked works, cherishing hard and unworthy thoughts of him and of his holy law, as if it were unreasonably rigorous in its demands, and unnecessarily severe in its denunciations. So far from seeking to palliate their offences, they will feel that they never can fully estimate the extent and the aggravation of these offences. It is no longer by thinking lightly of sin that they seek to escape from the fears that disturb them. That they ever did so greatly aggravated their guilt. But they feel that the temptation any longer to do so is removed by the gracious declaration, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." A full and free remission of sin is here announced to them, without any limit or qualification, and it is the infinite generosity of this announcement that melts them into godly sorrow for sin,— the sorrow that "worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of."

For a season, indeed, perhaps a long season, they may not be able to appropriate this precious promise to themselves, and to rejoice in it with all the fulness of joy which it is fitted to impart. Their natural ignorance and misapprehension of divine things, the fears and suspicions which a sense of guilt had awakened, their proneness to self-righteousness, and the yet unsubdued influence of corrupt affections and desires, may conspire to keep them for a time in a state of bondage, or to bring them again into that state, even after they had once experienced enlargement and deliverance. But they will not, they cannot remain contentedly in this state. By the teaching of the Spirit, enlightening their minds in the knowledge of Christ, they have discovered in the promise, that is, in the freely proclaimed salvation of the Gospel, glad tidings of great joy to the guilty. From the moment they made this discovery, hope was, in some degree, more or less lively, awakened in their minds, even at the same time that there was awakened also a deeper sense of sin than they had before felt. And with this hope they were conscious, for the first time, of something of a real desire of returning to God, and of being restored to his favour and fellowship,—something like a feeling of confidence and love towards him,—a feeling that grows in strength just as their hope becomes more lively. They cannot rest, therefore, with the mere knowledge of the fact, that God has found out a way by which he can consistently say of sinners, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more," and with the vague hope that this promise may, perhaps, be fulfilled in them. They cannot be satisfied with any thing less than the assurance or well-grounded hope that it has been fulfilled in regard to them,—that their transgression has been forgiven, that their sin has been covered, and that the Lord no longer imputes unto them their iniquity. They feel that nothing short of this can give them that confidence towards God, that love to him, and that joy and delight in his service, which it is the great object of the Gospel to awaken and keep alive in their hearts. They cannot, therefore, rest satisfied until they have good ground to believe that God has forgiven their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more. And this is one of the main differences between those who are deeply exercised in soul about their salvation, and those who have a form of godliness, but are strangers to the power thereof.

The former,—those who are in earnest about their eternal interests,—will never be at rest until they have all the certainty which it is possible for them to attain, and which they are encouraged to seek after, that they have actually received the forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus. The latter, and I fear they are not few, are contented to dream on with some kind of feeble hope, that perhaps they may hereafter, at some future period, they know not when, be pardoned, and so escape punishment. With them the declaration of a free and full forgiveness serves only to make them think more lightly of sin, as that which may be easily forgiven, and on account of which, therefore, they need not be greatly distressed. Oh, that such would reflect, and seriously ask themselves whether this can be the effect which the Gospel was designed to produce,—that of making them more careless and worldly-minded, and less feelingly alive to the evil and demerit of that for which the Son of God suffered and died!

Such, I fear, is the only effect which the proclamation of the free grace of the Gospel has upon many. The scheme of the Gospel is essentially a scheme of mercy; and to those who take a vague and superficial view of it as such, it will present much to encourage the hope that they may escape the punishment of sin, though they have never had any deep sense of its deformity, nor any earnest desire to be delivered from its pollution and power. Thus the hope of forgiveness serves only to confirm them in a fatal delusion; for not only is their hope vague and indistinct, but it is this very vagueness that gives it any power to quiet their fears, and to enable them to say to themselves, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. They dare not inquire rigorously into the foundation of their hope. It were too searching an inquiry for their peace, disclosing to them what they have no desire to know, and condemning, as inconsistent with their safety, what they are not willing to abandon. They are contented with their hope, therefore, just because it is indistinct, shadowy, and vague. How different is it with those who are really in earnest about their salvation, and with whom an interest in Christ is the one thing needful! They cannot be satisfied with a hope of which they can render no reason. With them the great subject of concern is, whether they have unreservedly and cordially closed with Christ, so as to be personally

interested in the benefits of his redemption. It is, in fact, the earnestness of their desire to have some certainty or assurance on this point, and the fear lest they should be deceiving themselves, that in many cases cost them great anxiety, and not a little distress, before they reach a state of solid peace and comfort; and however lively their hope may become, they will still feel the necessity of giving all diligence to make their calling and election sure,—to have all the certainty which they can obtain, that the gracious promise has been fulfilled to them,—that the Lord has forgiven them their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more. And to all such, this passage is full of consolation and encouragement. The declaration of a full forgiveness is followed up by an assurance of the stability of the covenant in virtue of which that forgiveness is granted; so that they who have been so forgiven may repose with confidence in the unchangeableness of God's gracious purpose concerning them: "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever."

This declaration of the stability of the new covenant, and the consequent perpetuity of the Church of God, on the other hand, must have been peculiarly consoling to the faithful remnant in Jeremiah's time. Indeed, the whole passage seems to have been framed with the view of solving the doubts and dispelling the fears which might naturally have arisen in their minds respecting the promised covenant. They had seen Israel, as a nation, forfeit and lose their covenant relation to God through sin, and were about to witness the infliction of his judgment, to avenge the quarrel of his covenant. And might not the Church, in like manner, forfeit and lose their relation to God under the new covenant? No; for thus it is written in the 33d verse, "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law," not before them, on tables of stone, but "in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." This assuredly was a precious promise. But to humble and devout believers in Judah,—to those who felt most

deeply their obligation to obey the divine law,—who desired most earnestly to do so,—and who did in reality delight therein, as the joy and rejoicing of their heart,—to them another difficulty might still present itself. Conscious of their own weakness, the deceitfulness of their heart, and their proneness to forsake God, they might be ready to say, But even though the law be once written on the heart, may it not be again effaced, and so their covenant relation dissolved, as the tables of stone had before been broken? To this, also, the reply is, No; for Jehovah pledges his truth and faithfulness that he will undertake for his people that they shall never lose their covenant privileges: "If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever." Thus the most settled and stable things in the universe, the ordinances of the sun and moon, on the permanence and regularity of which men reckon with the most perfect confidence,—these are referred to for the purpose of conveying to the Church, or people of God, a pledge of the unchangeableness of his gracious purposes towards them. This is done, of course, in accommodation to their weakness; for, as has been beautifully said on this passage, "The constancy of the reign of grace, considered in itself, is far greater than that of the course of nature." The heavens "shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed." Heaven and earth shall pass away, but "God's word shall not pass away."

All this might appear to the faithful few in Judah as not only wonderful but impossible, considering the great and aggravated guilt which as a nation they had incurred. But to remove this doubt, also, they are assured that it was impossible for God, the faithful and covenant-keeping God, to cast off his true people, the spiritual seed of Israel. The carnal and hypocritical, those who professed to be of Israel, but were not Israel, he would indeed cast off; and the time was not distant when their rejection would be made visible to all in the judgment that was coming upon them. But that the remnant of his believing people should be cast off was impossible: "Thus saith the Lord; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord." And to this assurance of the

stability of the new covenant is added, in the last verses of the chapter, a promise of the extension of its blessings beyond all that Israel had ever witnessed.

This establishment of Messiah's kingdom is represented as the rebuilding of Jerusalem. But what renders the promise peculiarly expressive and emphatic is, that in this restoration or building up again of Zion, places that formerly lay beyond the precincts of Jerusalem, because they were unholy or unclean, would then be included in the holy city, and be themselves holy unto the Lord. Thus it is said, "The measuring line shall yet go forth over against it upon the hill Gareb,"—that is, the hill of the leprous,—"and shall compass about to Goath,"—that is, the place of execution: "and the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, . . . shall be holy unto the Lord."

It will be recollected that previous to this time the whole of Jerusalem itself, nay, even the very courts of the house of God, had been polluted with idols,—so low was the cause of truth,—so nearly triumphant was the power of Satan. How glorious, then, the contrast which the new dispensation, as here foretold, presents to the former, when not only Jerusalem itself should be cleansed, but when places which had always been unclean, and which therefore lay beyond her walls, should be included and become holy unto the Lord!

Are we personally interested in that covenant in virtue of which these glorious results have already been, and will yet be still more largely brought about? If we are, then we must have, —or, at least, we shall not rest satisfied until we have,—good and solid ground to hope that God has forgiven our iniquity, and will remember our sin no more. And if we have become partakers of this hope, it will be our great concern that the precious promises here recorded should be fulfilled in all their extent in ourselves and others. They will be fulfilled, for they are the promises of the faithful and covenant-keeping God. But this is the very consideration which will animate us to labour in being instrumental in bringing them about,—even the consideration that our labour cannot be in vain in the Lord. So the apostle argues when he says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

L.

CHRIST GIVES HIS OWN NAME TO THE CHURCH.

JEREMIAH XXXIII. 14-26.

THE prediction or promise recorded in this passage is twofold,—first, the stability of David's throne; and, second, the perpetuity of the priesthood. Such a promise must, in any circumstances, have been very precious to the Church. But not only are all God's promises very precious in themselves.—None can have failed to observe that in his dealings with his people he has so timed his promises,—so chosen the occasion of making or renewing them,—as thereby to furnish very affecting proofs of his care and kindness; and of this the passage before us is an example. The prediction here recorded was delivered by Jeremiah, while he "was shut up in the court of the prison," during the siege of Jerusalem by the army of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and within less than two years from the time when the city was taken and destroyed. The kings of Judah,—the descendants of David and his successors on the throne,—had one after another become more degenerate and more obstinately blind to the coming judgments of God. Jehoiachin, who immediately preceded Zedekiah, had already been dethroned and carried captive to Babylon; and the time was at hand when Zedekiah, who was king when Jerusalem was taken, was to be treated in a similar manner, but with still greater cruelty; for we are told in a subsequent chapter, that "the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes," and, moreover, that "he

put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon." To all appearance, then, the throne of David was to be overthrown; and if so, what was to become of the kingdom of Judah, seeing that their permanence as the people of God had been bound up with the permanency of David's house, and the stability of David's throne? But this was not all. With the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple itself,—the house of God,—was to be laid in ashes. The holy place was to be desolate and deserted,—the place which God had chosen to put his name there, and of which he had said, "Thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave-offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord." With the destruction of the temple, therefore, the services of the priests and Levites were also apparently at an end. And if so, how were the people of God thenceforth to approach him, and receive those tokens of his favour which he had been wont to impart to them, when he accepted their sacrifice and their burnt-offering? It was, assuredly, a very dark prospect to the faithful remnant in Judah thus to anticipate the certain and immediate execution of a judgment, which, so far as they could see, threatened to overturn the throne of David, on which hung the very existence of Israel as the people of God, and to put an end to the office of the priesthood,—that ordinance by which alone they could offer their sacrifices with acceptance to God.

But this extremity of perplexity and trouble was just the occasion of a peculiar manifestation of the divine condescension and kindness. While the burden of the prophet's commission,—the main purpose for which he was called to the prophetic office,—was to announce a message of lamentation, and mourning, and woe to the house of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, he was, on the occasion before us, charged with a message of a very different kind, and one which we may well suppose was unspeakably consoling to himself,—even to speak "good words and comfortable words" to the afflicted remnant of God's people. He was instructed to speak to them on the two subjects that did then especially perplex and disturb them, namely, the kingly and priestly offices, both of which, as they might be ready to conclude, were about to be extinguished for ever.

He was commanded to assure them, and to give them the highest and most infallible of all securities for the assurance, namely, "Thus saith Jehovah,"—I say, he was commanded to assure them that their fears in regard to both were unfounded. The threatened judgment was, indeed, to be inflicted,—the house and throne of David were to decay and become well-nigh extinct,—and the priesthood also was to cease from being what it once was. But from the decayed root of David there was to spring "the Branch of righteousness," even "the Branch" that God had "made strong" for himself, who should "execute judgment and righteousness in the land," in whose days Judah should be saved, and Jerusalem should dwell safely. "For thus saith the Lord; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel." And, in like manner, with regard to the office of the priesthood, it was declared that it too should be permanent, notwithstanding of all appearances to the contrary; for immediately after the promise of the stability of David's throne, it is added, "Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt-offerings, and to kindle meat-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually." And this promise, at once so precious and so seasonable, is repeated with a reference, as in a former chapter, to the stability of the course of nature, as a pledge or token of the unchangeableness of God's promise concerning the kingly and priestly offices, with the permanence of which the well-being, or rather the very existence of his Church was bound up: "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers." Farther, it is declared of the house of David, and of the Levites the priests, not only that they should be permanent, but that they should increase far beyond what they had ever been: "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me." And then again, in opposition to avowed unbelievers, or downcast and desponding believers, who were ready to say, "The two families," that is, Israel and Judah,

"which the Lord hath chosen, he hath even cast them off,"—in opposition to this sentiment of unbelief or despondency, the promise is again repeated, "If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them."

Such was the gracious and most seasonable promise whereby God was pleased to visit and refresh his heritage, the faithful remnant in Judah, when it was weary. I need hardly remark that the promise gave God's people no ground to expect that the threatened judgment on Judah and Jerusalem was to be averted, or even delayed. On the contrary, the promise was given for the very purpose of supporting them under the calamity which was about to overtake them, assuring them that though to all appearance that calamity was to put an end to the reign of David's house, and to the office of the priesthood, yet there was a glory in reserve for both, far exceeding any thing that they or their fathers had ever witnessed. And the promise was, to a certain extent, fulfilled at the termination of the seventy years' captivity at Babylon, when the captives returned to their own land under the guidance of Zerubbabel, the representative of the house of David, and Joshua the high priest, the successor of Aaron. But even this restoration, though a glorious display of the power and faithfulness of God, was rather a new pledge of the fulfilment of the promise in the passage before us than the fulfilment itself. That promise referred mainly to a future and a still distant period,—a period at which the royal house of David, as well as the priesthood, was in a weaker and more wasted state than it was at the time of the Babylonish captivity. I refer, of course, to the advent of Christ, when the sceptre was about to depart altogether from Judah,—when the house of David was so fallen into obscurity that there was not a representative thereof to assert, or even claim his right to the throne,—and when the temple, though still crowded with nominal priests and professing worshippers, was worse than destroyed, inasmuch as it had been made "a den of thieves." This was a state of things which, if not outwardly so disastrous, was in reality more

deplorable than when Nebuchadnezzar burnt Jerusalem and the temple, and carried the king, the priests, and the people captive to Babylon. The house of David was all but extinct, like a tree decayed and dead; and those who should have been the priests of the most high God, and who still bore the title of the chief priests, were those who afterwards persecuted, and crucified, and slew the Lord of glory. But it was then that there grew "up unto David . . . the Branch of righteousness." Of an obscure individual of David's house He was born of whom it is elsewhere declared that he should sit on David's throne, and reign over the house of Israel and Judah for ever. And on that throne he now sits and reigns, and "must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet."

The promise, then, so far as it regards the kingly office in Judah, has been fulfilled only in Christ. And so, in like manner, with respect to "the Levites the priests," God's "ministers;" for Christ is "a priest upon his throne." By the one sacrifice of himself, and by the continual presentation of the incense of his intercession in the most holy place, even in heaven itself, he has accomplished what all the priests of old, from the day of Aaron's consecration, nay, from the very beginning, did but typify and shadow forth. And thus was this prediction fulfilled in a way far more glorious than the carnal Israel ever dreamt of, or than even the true Israel could fully comprehend or conceive of. In the exaltation of Christ to universal dominion as King in Zion, and in the exercise of his everlasting priesthood, we find at once the accomplishment and the explanation of the promise, "David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt-offerings, and to kindle meat-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually." But this is not the whole of the promise. It is farther declared, not only that God's covenant with David his servant, and with the Levites the priests, his ministers, was as stable and sure as the covenant of the day and of the night, but also that the seed of both should increase, so that no man could number them; for, "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister

unto me." And this, too, has already been largely fulfilled, and is still in progress of fulfilment. Already have multitudes of many nations been turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," receiving "forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus." This work of calling and converting sinners still goes on, whereby there are "added to the Church daily" those that shall be saved. And there will yet be gathered into it a "multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." And what is to be the rank, the standing, and the character of this vast multitude that are to be redeemed from among the children of men? The Scriptures are very full in regard to the high and honourable place which the redeemed are to occupy Christ himself says of them, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." "And if children," says an apostle, "then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ;" if so be that they suffer with him, that they may be also glorified together: for if they suffer with him, they shall also reign with him. It is farther declared of them, that they are "an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;" yea, that they are "a royal priesthood," and that they are privileged to sing the marvellous song, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Such I apprehend is the meaning, and such will be the fulfilment of the prediction in the 22d verse, "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me." And the view which we have taken of the passage, generally, may help us, I think, to the right understanding of the 15th and 16th verses, to which I would more particularly direct attention: "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she,"—that is, Jerusalem, or the Church,—"shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness."

These words will be found to be almost a literal repetition of the promise recorded in the 5th and 6th verses of the 23d chapter, but with this remarkable difference, that in the 23d chapter it is said, "This is the name whereby he,"—that is, the Branch of righteousness, or Messiah,—"shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness;" whereas, in the passage before us, it is said, "This is the name wherewith she,"—that is, Jerusalem, or the Church, —"shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." The name or title, then, which in the one passage is given to Christ himself, is in the other given to the Church. And this fact suggests at first sight the doctrine which is stated so frequently, and placed in such a variety of lights in Scripture,—namely, the union, or oneness, between Christ and his Church. The rest of the passage, too, as we have already seen, plainly points to the same truth, identifying Christ and his people, representing them as included in the covenant made with him, and declaring of them that they shall be partakers of the glory and honour to which he has been exalted. He reigns supreme as King in Zion, the rightful heir of David's throne. But they shall reign with him; for having in his grace and strength overcome, they shall sit down with him on his throne, even as he also overcame and sat down with his Father on his throne. But the fact that Christ's name is here named upon his Church, does not merely suggest in a general way his oneness with his people. The name or title itself is full of meaning. As applied to Christ when he is called "The Lord our Righteousness," it sets forth, very concisely, but very comprehensively, his mediatorial work,—all that he undertook to do and endure, for working out a perfect righteousness that might be available for the acceptance and salvation of as many as the Father had given him. And when thus applied, it is as expressive as it is appropriate, seeing that he is indeed his people's righteousness, —that on which he can claim their salvation as a reward that he has won,—and on account of which, when imputed to them as their own, God sees "no iniquity in Jacob," and "no perverseness in Israel." But the same title is applied to the Church, also, because it is in and by the Church that the glorious results of Christ's righteousness are fully unfolded. It is in the salvation of the Church that God hath manifested forth his glory; for thereby has been made known "to principalities and powers in

heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God." It is in the salvation of his people that Christ sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. This was "the joy that was set before him," and for which he "endured the cross, despising the shame." The Church is essential to the manifestation of Christ's mediatorial glory. She is "his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all," —that by which the value and blessed effects of his righteousness can alone be fully manifested.

When Christ came into the world to accomplish the work which he had undertaken, neither he himself personally, nor the righteousness which he fulfilled, was understood or appreciated by the world. Though, while he tabernacled here among men, he was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" and though in that state of humiliation he was accomplishing a work unspeakably the most glorious, so far as we know or can conceive, of all the wonderful and glorious works of God,—even that of rendering the pardon of the guilty not only consistent with the rectitude, but subservient to the glory of the great Lawgiver and Judge;—I say, though Christ tabernacled among men for the accomplishment of this work, yet he was not recognised, nor was his work understood or perceived. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." Yea, "he came unto his own,"—to those who had long been separated from the rest of the world as the special objects of his providential care,—"but his own received him not." He was thus unknown and unnoticed, though in himself he was Jehovah the Lord of glory, and though he was engaged in a work into which angels desire to look, and by which God was to be glorified as he had not been even in the work of creation. The work, then, on account of which Christ is called, "The Lord our Righteousness," was but little known or appreciated during his own manifestation in the flesh. He wrought out that righteousness in great obscurity; for of the first thirty years of his sojourn on earth, the only history that we have is the record of two or three incidents, and these chiefly intimations of the lowly circumstances in which he was placed. He wrought out righteousness for his people in a state of great humility, for while a child he was like other children under parental control; and even after his holy human soul had begun to apprehend his

heavenly Father's business, even the great work which it had been given him to do, it is expressly recorded of him that when Joseph and Mary "found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions," "he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." And even when he entered formally and publicly on his work, his condition was still the humblest, inasmuch as those whom he had enlightened, and comforted, and saved, ministered to him of their substance for the supply of his temporal wants, and inasmuch as we find him saying, in reference to himself, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He carried on his work, too, in the face of great contempt, for though he was no doubt followed and often applauded by the multitude, yet it was, in the main, a senseless and fickle multitude, actuated by mere wonder, or the hope of worldly advantage, and as ready at the last to cry, "Crucify him, crucify him," as they had once been to take him by force and make him king. He grew up "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground;" he had "no form nor comeliness;" and when men saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him. He was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" men,—even good but ignorant and prejudiced men,—hid as it were their faces from him; he was despised, and they esteemed him not. He persevered, moreover, in working out his people's righteousness, in spite of ridicule and reproach the most cruel and cutting; for when his enemies had him in their power, they maliguantly taunted him with his miraculous deeds of mercy and benevolence. "He saved others," said they; "himself he cannot save." As his work drew to a close, he found himself in a state of desertion also; for not only was he forsaken of all his disciples, even the boldest and most devoted, but on the cross he was constrained to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And the work at last closed in death; for when he could say, "It is finished," "he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost," and was laid in the grave.

It was thus that Christ wrought out a perfect righteousness in obscurity, privation, reproach, desertion, and death; and when it was over, the ungodly world, that crucified and slew him,

would soon have forgotten its guilty deed, or remembered it only to triumph in the thought that they had for ever extinguished his name and his cause. But the world was soon startled from its vain security. The work, which they regarded only with contempt, was followed by results which they could neither overlook nor despise; the name, which they flattered themselves was soon to be for ever forgotten, wrought wonders which they could not contemplate without amazement and terror. Christ began to assert and vindicate his sovereignty in and by his Church. Thousands in Jerusalem itself, and tens of thousands throughout the world, were made the living monuments of his redeeming grace and power. The governments of this world took alarm; kings and princes combined for the overthrow of Christ's kingdom; and the ungodly multitudes were always but too ready to lend themselves as instruments of persecution and cruelty against his people. But they imagined a vain thing. The very persecution which the Church endured served to bring out more clearly the grace and power by which she was sustained. Through that grace, the followers of Christ were enabled to exhibit the reflected image of their divine Master,—even the manifestation of a purity, self-denial, patience, and charity, such as the world had never till then seen. The effects of that perfect righteousness which Christ wrought out were not only experienced by his believing people, in the joy, and peace, and everlasting consolation, and good hope, of which they were made partakers, but manifested also to the world in the character with which he invested them. The sovereignty to which he has been exalted, as the reward of his perfect righteousness, was not only exercised in the conversion of his people, but asserted and vindicated in sustaining them against the assaults of their enemies, in strengthening them to hold fast their profession, and in giving them courage to testify, at all hazards, for him and for his cause, against an ungodly world. So it was with the primitive Christian Church, and so it is still; for when we think of the resistance which the truth meets with in every human heart, until the natural enmity of the carnal mind be slain by the sword of the Spirit,—and when we reflect on the innumerable combinations which, from age to age, have been formed against the truth by ungodly men, instigated and aided by the powers

of darkness,—we must be convinced that the continued existence of a Church on the earth at all must be ascribed to the unceasing exercise of Christ's sovereign authority and power. But the Church exists, because it is in and by his Church that Christ demonstrates his right to rule as Mediator, as having, by his perfect righteousness, satisfied the demands of God's eternal law, —yea, magnified and made it honourable. Christ thus identifies himself with his Church; and, therefore, he names his name upon her: "And this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness."

The subject which we have been considering, if seriously pondered, will be found to be a very searching, as well as a very encouraging one. Searching it ought assuredly to be, for it suggests a very solemn inquiry. If the rank, the standing, the character of the Church be as is here represented,—if Christ so identifies himself with her as to name his own name upon her,— if it is by the privileges which he has bestowed upon her, and by the character with which he invests her, that he asserts his own sovereignty, and manifests forth his own glory,—then, surely, to belong to his Church implies a great deal more than merely a profession of faith in him, and a reputable character in the eyes of men. The subject can hardly fail, I think, to force upon us the question, whether there is really any thing in us or about us that indicates our relationship to so holy and so honourable a community as the Church, the true Church of Christ, is here represented to be. It is not enough to say that we have hope in him, and in him alone, for our own personal salvation. This, no doubt, is our first concern, and, until we attain to that hope, there will be but little concern for the great object which the Church is designed to serve,—that of showing forth the praises of her divine Head. But if we have arrived at some good measure of hope regarding our soul's salvation, have we also endeavoured to realise and to bear in mind the honour, and the dignity, and the privileges which Christ bestows upon his people? Do we frequently dwell with admiration on these privileges, and seek to realise them more vividly? Do we indeed and in sober seriousness believe that Christ has identified or bound up the manifestation of his own glory with the interests and the character of his Church on the earth? Are we really convinced that

he has bestowed this honour upon his people? And are we anxious to know and be assured that we personally and individually share in this honour? It is not enough that we believe concerning the Church at large,—believers in their collective capacity,—that Christ is glorified in and by them. Each individual among them is a partaker of this honour and privilege; and it is only in so far as we believe and feel this, that it will exercise any powerful influence in constraining us to walk worthy of our high and holy vocation. We are in great danger of losing a right sense both of our privileges and our responsibilities, by regarding these as belonging to the Church as a body, while we forget that if we are believers we share in them personally and individually. Our unbelief, too, may assume another form. We may allege to ourselves that on account of our great unworthiness, we have no claim and can make no pretensions to the honour of having Christ's name named upon us; and thus, under the appearance of humility, we may really be insensible not only to our privileges, but to the responsibility which these lay upon us to live to the praise and glory of Him who loved us, and gave himself for us. True humility would lead us to reason and to act very differently. It would render us still more deeply sensible of our utter unworthiness; but in the same degree would it deepen our sense of obligation to sovereign grace, and of our responsibility to estimate and improve aright the undeserved honour which that grace has bestowed. I fear, however, that there are many who do not even wish, nay, who would be afraid to think that they are partakers of the honour, and, therefore, brought under the responsibility of which we have been speaking. And what does this state of mind imply, but that their natural aversion to God and holiness is still unsubdued, and that, in professing to believe in Christ for salvation, they are professing to hope for that which they dread and dislike, and which they cannot, therefore, seriously desire?

But I trust there are many, also, who anxiously desire to participate personally in all the honour which Christ confers upon his people, and willing, moreover, to acknowledge to its full extent the responsibility which that honour carries with it. And to such the subject before us is very encouraging. They will be ready, I doubt not, to confess and lament that they have realised

so feebly their high and holy vocation, and have hitherto reflected so dimly the image of their divine Master, and that thus they have contributed so little to the showing forth of his praise, the manifestation of his glory. But if so, they have the strongest encouragement to ask and expect larger communications of grace, whereby they may contribute more largely to the great object which the Church on earth is designed to accomplish. It is their honest desire to serve him with what he gives them, to return to him according to the benefits which they receive. They may, therefore, ask largely, boldly, urgently; for they are asking him to do what he has himself declared is the great purpose for which he has established his Church on the earth, even that in and by the Church God may be glorified. God has already been glorified in their conversion,—in their being delivered from the bondage of sin and Satan,—in being made the trophies of Christ's redeeming power,—a portion of the reward of his perfect righteousness. But God is to be glorified, also, in their sanctification,—in the character which they exhibit in the sight of others, and by which they testify for the reality, and the greatness, and the value of Christ's mediatorial work, in opposition to an unbelieving and ungodly world. And this, too, will be accomplished in them. Their very desire that it should be so is a pledge or token that it will be so; for it is a recorded and sure promise, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." They may be disposed, perhaps, to regret that they can do but little for furthering the cause of truth,—that their influence is small, and that the circle within which they can hope to do any good is very limited. I think I can sympathise with the sentiment, for I have felt it. But the feeling is at the best an infirmity,—I fear it is a sin. There are two answers to the complaint of a want of power and influence to advance Christ's cause. First, he tries his people's fidelity, not by what they do, but by what they have the means and opportunities of doing,—a very severe test to many,—a very gracious test to his humble and lowly followers. Second, the Lord has appointed the lot of all his people, fixed the boundaries of their habitation, and determined all the circumstances of their condition; and one of the most important lessons which they have to learn is, to be willing to glorify God in the place which

he has assigned to them, without murmuring or regretting that they are not rich and influential, and so be able to do great and wonderful things for Christ and his Church. Such a feeling is direct rebellion against God, and against the wisdom of his appointments, and therefore directly opposed to the advancement of his glory. The man, however poor and humble, who contentedly and cheerfully labours to advance Christ's kingdom as he has means and opportunities, is one of those in whom especially the Lord is glorified; and the more that the Church abounds in such members, the more fully will the promise be fulfilled of her, "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness."

LI.

GOD A SANCTUARY TO HIS PEOPLE.

EZEKIEL XI. 16.

THIS promise is one which, I believe, has frequently been laid hold of, and pondered, and pleaded by God's people in seasons of affliction, when in solitude and loneliness they felt and lamented the privation for a time of their wonted spiritual privileges. And no wonder that the promise should be so laid hold on; for it is a very gracious promise. But to see the full force of it both for instruction and encouragement, it is necessary to take into view the circumstances in which it was originally given. It was addressed by the prophet Ezekiel to the captive Jews in the land of the Chaldeans, himself a captive, being carried away from Judah in the first captivity, when Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem, and took Jehoiachin the king, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and carried them to Babylon. This event took place eleven years before Nebuchadnezzar's last siege of Jerusalem, when he took it, and burned the city and temple with fire; for after dethroning Jehoiachin, and carrying him, and his princes, and chief men into captivity, he placed Zedekiah on the throne of Judah, who reigned eleven years, when, in consequence of his faithlessness in breaking the oath which he had sworn to the king of Babylon, and his hardened impenitence and contempt of God's word addressed to him by Jeremiah, he too was dethroned, and with the rest of his people was carried captive to Babylon.

It thus appears that Ezekiel, though younger as a prophet, was for a considerable time cotemporary with Jeremiah, exercising the prophetical office among his captive brethren in the land of Chaldea or Babylon, while Jeremiah continued to execute his commission among those who remained in Judah and Jerusalem under the reign of Zedekiah. We might naturally expect, therefore, that the writings of the two prophets, when referring to the same period, would naturally throw light on one another. And it will be found to be so in reference to the subject before us, inasmuch as we find both the prophets referring to that subject. Though Ezekiel dwelt among his captive brethren, and prophesied mainly on their account, yet we find him speaking also of the state, and character, and prospects of those who still remained in Judah and Jerusalem. And, in like manner, though Jeremiah, during the last years of his office, had to do chiefly with those of his countrymen whom Nebuchadnezzar had left in their own land under Zedekiah, yet we find him also referring at times to the condition of those who had been carried away captive with Jehoiachin. And from various passages in both the prophets, we are warranted, I think, to infer that those who were so carried away in the first, or Jehoiachin's captivity, and to whom Ezekiel ministered, were the better portion of the Jews, —I mean better morally and spiritually. And in proof of this, I need refer only to the 24th chapter of Jeremiah. There it is recorded that the Lord showed unto the prophet "two baskets of figs .... set before the temple of the Lord, after that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried away captive Jeconiah," or Jehoiachin, "king of Judah, and the princes of Judah. One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that were first ripe: and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad." And the Lord said unto the prophet, "Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land..... And I will give them an heart to know me, ... and they shall be my people, and I will be their God..... And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the Lord, So will I give Zedekiah, the king of

Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem; .... and I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers."

Of course, we are not to conclude that all who had already been carried captive were true believers, and that all who still remained in Judah and Jerusalem were utterly and hopelessly impenitent. We cannot doubt, from the promises that Jeremiah delivered, that the Lord had a faithful remnant in both portions; while there is reason to fear that even in the best the faithful were only a remnant. But it is plain, I think, from the communication made to Jeremiah, and to which I have referred, that the better and more numerous portion of God's people had been removed in the first captivity, and that they had been removed for their good, namely, that they might be withdrawn from the hardening influence of their impenitent brethren, and subjected to the salutary discipline of God's chastisement, whereby they might be brought back to him in penitence and faith. And the gracious communication vouchsafed to Jeremiah concerning them is in substance the same with what was revealed to Ezekiel as recorded in the passage before us. It appears from the immediately preceding context, as well as from other passages, that the residue of Judah and Jerusalem who still remained in their own land, instead of taking warning by the judgment which had come upon their brethren who were carried into captivity, had become more presumptuous, arrogant, and self-righteous. They secretly flattered themselves, nay, they openly boasted that they had done nothing, as their captive brethren had done, to forfeit their privileges,—that they were still in the possession of their country, their city, and their temple,—and that the very fact of their being so was a proof that they were the only rightful heirs of the inheritance sworn unto their fathers. It was to rebuke this arrogance on the part of the residue of Judah and Jerusalem that the vision of the baskets of figs was presented to Jeremiah; and it was to comfort and to keep alive the faith and the hope of the captives, in their

state of apparent desertion, that a vision was vouchsafed to Ezekiel also, in which he saw the glory of the Lord departing from the temple at Jerusalem, and going up from the midst of the city, —a very solemn intimation of the judgment that was soon to overtake the residue of the Jews that still remained in their own land. This vision, with the communications which accompanied it, the prophet rehearsed to his captive brethren in the land of the Chaldeans; and part of these communications is contained in the verse before us: "Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly,"—that is, all who had gone into captivity,—"are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the Lord: unto us is this land given in possession. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."

The purpose, then, for which the promise was originally given, was to sustain and comfort the true people of God, whom he had sent into captivity, and who were thereby to all appearance disinherited,—cast out of the possession which had been given to them and to their fathers,—and deprived of the best and richest of all privileges, that of drawing near to God in the place where he had chosen to put his name there, and where he had especially promised to meet with and bless his people. How large, then, and how full of meaning, must the promise be that was to compensate for the privations which God's people were then suffering, and to keep alive their faith and hope in a state of seeming desertion! We must never forget, that to be carried into captivity was a very different thing to Jews, especially to the devout and believing, from what it ever was or ever could be to any other people. It was not merely tearing asunder all those ties which bind men to the land of their birth, and exchanging all the comforts and endearments of home for the privations of a state of exile into which they were carried by a victorious enemy. Even in this respect captivity was a sorer calamity to the Jews than to other men, inasmuch as they regarded their own land as the glory of all lands, and not without reason; for though, in consequence of their disobedience, they

had forfeited many of the blessings which they would otherwise have enjoyed there, still it must have retained much of the character which had been given of it to their fathers, and which it might again have been to them if they had turned wholly unto the Lord: "The land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." But the land from which they were exiled was not only a good land, and, in their estimation, the glory of all lands; it had been secured to them by covenant, and so secured that no hostile power could have vanquished or even invaded it, if they had been faithful in their allegiance to the Lord their God. Their captivity, then, was at once the melancholy proof and the bitter fruit of the violation of their covenant engagement to God,—an expression of the divine displeasure with them,—a declaration which could not be misunderstood, that they had forfeited all the blessings and privileges which had been promised to their fathers, and which, through many ages of forbearance and long-suffering on the part of God, had descended to them. And was there not enough in this consideration alone to fill the minds of the humble, the devout, and the truly penitent among the captive Jews with deep sorrow and dejection? May we not conceive that they would be ready to give way to the desponding thought that God had cast them off for ever? Though it might be true that they were suffering mainly because of the sins of their guiltier brethren, whose ungodliness and immorality could no longer be endured, yet they, I mean the truly humble among the captives, would be the last to think or to say so. Like the truly humble and penitent in every age, they would think their own sins the most aggravated, and the most deserving of the divine judgment, and would be ready to conclude, therefore, that for these sins they had been cast out of the land sworn unto their fathers, and that so they had lost the favour of God for ever.

And in such circumstances, how greatly did they need all the consolation which Ezekiel was commissioned to administer to them! It is true, provision had been made before Ezekiel's time, if they knew or remembered it, for keeping alive their

hope even in a state of captivity; for as the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah had predicted the captivity itself, so they had foretold also the restoration. Nay, the promise of that restoration to the truly penitent was as old as the time of Moses; for after setting before Israel the curse that would assuredly overtake them if they forsook the Lord their God, he was commanded to say to them, "It shall come to pass when all these things are come upon thee, ... and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice, according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee." But precious as this promise was, can we not easily conceive that the humble captives might have great difficulty in applying it to themselves? Is it not the experience of many, even in these Gospel days, that in seasons of spiritual depression, when they have lost the peace and good hope which they once experienced, they are ready to conclude that they are deserted and cast off,—that God is angry with them,—and that they have no right to take and appropriate to themselves the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel. They who have thus felt and feared will have no difficulty in conceiving what must have been the depressing weight that hung upon the spirits of the humble and penitent Jewish captives. Even though they remembered and believed the promise given by Moses, renewed in answer to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and frequently repeated by the prophets of subsequent times,—the promise, namely, that God would visit his people, and turn again their captivity,—I say, though they might remember and believe this, still it did not follow that they would be able to apply it to themselves. They might believe that it would be fulfilled in their children, or their children's children. But they were themselves suffering under a visible token of the divine displeasure, such as no believer can now be subject to. They were in captivity in a strange land,—a calamity which had always been represented as the last and sorest of God's judgments,—and in that state they might live

and die. The promise, too, as given by Moses, seemed to be a qualified promise, "If thou shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice, according to all that I command thee this day, ... then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity." But how were they to know whether they had so turned; for they had no longer the means or opportunities of observing many of the ordinances which Moses prescribed, and, especially, they had not access to God by those sacrifices which could be acceptably offered only in the temple at Jerusalem, the place which he had chosen to put his name there?

This was, no doubt, the most depressing as it was the heaviest part of their calamity. It was like directly casting them out of God's presence, and shutting up the way of return to him. Even the promise of a future restoration might fail, for a time, to bring them relief and enlargement of heart; for how were they to have access to God in the meanwhile? or how were they to present to him an acceptable offering? The very idea of drawing near to God must have been associated in their mind with Jerusalem and the temple; and when they thought how far away they were from that place, they must have been weighed down with sorrow and sadness of heart. And we have their own testimony that it was so. "By the rivers of Babylon," said they, "there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." And was there, then, any comfort or encouragement that could be immediately available for such depressed and downcast mourners? or were they to remain inconsolable till the day of their deliverance came, if they should live to see it,—even the termination of the seventy years foretold by Jeremiah? No. Immediate and abundant consolation was provided for them; and, large as that consolation was, it is wrapt up in the single short sentence, "Thus saith the Lord God, Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."

The expression "a little sanctuary," is by some rendered "a

sanctuary for a little while;" whereby the promise is made to intimate that the captivity of God's people was to be only temporary, and comparatively of short duration. Others, who adopt the rendering in our version,—"a little sanctuary,"—understand it as meaning, that though there was no temple for the captives to worship in, no house like that which Solomon had built, and which was "exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries," yet they should, nevertheless, have a sanctuary in the land of their exile, and that God himself would be that sanctuary. But in either view of the expression, the promise is, in substance, the same,—namely, that the believing captives should enjoy the presence of God. And the promise is very emphatic and full of meaning, when viewed in connection with the vision which appeared to the prophet, as recorded in the conclusion of the chapter. In that vision he beheld the glory of the Lord going up from the midst of Jerusalem, forsaking the temple where formerly it had been wont to dwell. It was thus plainly and very solemnly intimated, that the residue of Judah and Jerusalem, who still gloried in their possession of the temple, were glorying in that which could not profit,—even in a material structure, gorgeous and imposing to the senses, but destitute of that which could alone make it the house of God, even the presence of God himself; while their captive brethren, whom they regarded as outcasts from the divine favour, were to enjoy tokens of God's nearness to them. And we cannot doubt that these tokens were not only numerous, but easily recognised and deeply felt. The very presence of Ezekiel among them, charged with a message of comfort or of reproof, as they might need it, was itself a standing proof that God had not forsaken them, but that his thoughts towards them were "thoughts of peace, and not of evil," to give them "an expected end" of their captivity. The deliverance of Daniel and his three companions, while it could not fail greatly to strengthen the faith and revive the hope of all the believing captives in Babylon, must have operated strongly in their favour in the minds of those among whom they sojourned, while we cannot doubt that they experienced many interpositions on their behalf in times of trouble, in which, though not miraculous, they could not but recognise the hand of God. The

high place, too, to which Daniel was exalted, and which he occupied during the whole period of the captivity, as chief counsellor to the successive kings of Babylon and Persia, must have afforded him manifold opportunities and effectual means of alleviating the sufferings of his captive brethren, and mitigating the hardships which they must have suffered at the hand of the heathen who had carried them captive.

But precious and consoling as these proofs of the divine favour must have been, they did not form the only or the chief subject of the promise in the passage before us. It is plain, from the language of the promise itself, that it referred mainly to spiritual blessings,—those blessings which the captives had lost when they were deprived of the privilege of having access to God in the sanctuary, and which they might be ready to conclude could not be enjoyed in the land of the heathen. They were assured that God himself would be their sanctuary; and the promise must have been fulfilled in pouring down upon them in larger abundance "the spirit of grace and of supplications," awakening in their souls a deep sense of the sins whereby they had provoked the Lord to anger, and godly sorrow on account of them,—calling forth contrite confession, and earnest supplication for mercy,—enabling them to justify God in all his dealings with them, and to cast themselves on his disposal in humble submission to his will,—giving them freedom to pour out their hearts before him amidst all their sufferings and privations,—imparting to them a comforting sense of his nearness as the hearer of prayer, the dwelling-place of his people, their refuge and strength, a very present help in the time of trouble,—bringing the promises of his Word, which they had formerly read or heard, to their remembrance, and so enlightening their minds in the meaning of these promises, and strengthening their confidence in the faithfulness of them, as to enable them to take the comfort which they were designed to impart. If God was indeed a sanctuary to them, it must have been by thus giving them a sense of his gracious presence while engaged in spiritual exercises, whether privately, or in the family, or with others who, like themselves, feared the Lord, and spake often one to another; for the very idea of finding God himself to be their sanctuary implies his gracious nearness to them at any time or in

any place, independently of the material temple where they had been wont especially to expect a realising sense of the divine presence. And did not these destitute and apparently forlorn captives thus make a great and precious discovery, even in the land of their exile, where they might have looked only for darkness and desertion? They discovered, to an extent which they did not before know,—perhaps could not easily conceive of,—that the felt presence of Jehovah, as the faithful and covenant-keeping God, might be largely enjoyed even at a great distance from what they had been taught to regard as the dwelling-place of his glory. Their views of the grace and condescension of God, and of the privileges of those who fear him, must have been greatly enlarged,—resembling somewhat those that have opened up to believers in Gospel times, when God is revealed in Christ as accessible at all times and in all places more fully than he ever was even in the temple at Jerusalem.

I do not mean to say that the believing Jews in Babylon enjoyed all this liberty and freedom of access to God; for the new and the living way of approach, consecrated through the rent veil of the Redeemer's flesh, was not yet laid open. Neither was the privilege which they enjoyed in their captivity such as to make them feel that they could afford to part with Jerusalem and Mount Zion for ever, and be reconciled to the thought of never returning thither. The nearness to God which they experienced in their captivity, when he was himself their sanctuary, was, indeed, a rich foretaste of the privilege of Gospel times, but not that privilege itself. Before that privilege could be won for the Church in all its fulness, God had much to do with the temple at Jerusalem. It must be rebuilt, the sacrifices must be renewed, and the Mosaic economy must be continued, till the Messenger of the covenant appeared and fulfilled, in his own person, all that had till then been only typified or prefigured. It was not the design, therefore, of God's gracious manifestation of himself to his captive people in Babylon, to render them independent of the hope of deliverance from captivity, or to suppress in their minds the desire of returning again to Jerusalem, and enjoying, as they had formerly been wont to do, the privilege of going up unto the house of the Lord. The frequent repetition of the promise that God would turn their captivity

shows that it was never intended that they should forget Jerusalem, or cease to long for their return thither, and for the enjoyment, as before, of the temple or sanctuary service. And, accordingly, we find that even Daniel himself, the "man greatly beloved," in the midst of all the wonderful revelations that were vouchsafed to him, never ceased to remember Jerusalem and Mount Zion as the place where, especially, God was to be sought and found, as the hearer of prayer, and a very present help in the time of trouble; for it is recorded of him, that when the writing was signed by Darius the king, which was to consign to the lion's den any one who should ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of the king, and when Daniel knew that this decree had been passed and signed, "he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." But though Jerusalem never could be, and never was intended to be forgotten by God's people, under the old dispensation, still the believing captives in Babylon had a foretaste of the privileges of Gospel times, in being admitted to near and intimate fellowship with God, without the intervention of the rites and ordinances of the temple service; and though they sat and wept by the rivers of Babylon when they thought of Zion, yet they experienced also a refreshing of spirit, which must have filled them with admiration as well as gratitude, when the Lord fulfilled his gracious promise to them, "Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."

And if such was the value of the promise to those to whom it was originally given, how full of encouragement and how rich in consolation should it be to believers now! The promise was not exclusively designed for the captives in Babylon. It is the property of the Church in all ages; and it has, accordingly, been renewed under the Gospel dispensation with a fulness altogether unknown to the Old Testament Church. There are two points on which the condition of the people of God now differs from that of his people of old, in reference to the subject before us. In the first place, the full manifestation of God's gracious presence is no longer confined to one place, as it formerly was. It is now as our Lord foretold that it would be, when he said

to the woman of Samaria, "Believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father;" but "when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." And, secondly, no change in the outward circumstances of believers now can be so severe a trial to them as it was to God's people of old to be driven out "from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord." Wherever or in whatever circumstances believers may be placed, they may lay their hand on the head of the one great sacrifice which has been offered, and find, in their blessed experience, that, through its infinite worth and efficacy, they have "boldness to enter into the holiest,"—even into the very presence of God. If they have reason to regard God's dealings with them as expressions of his displeasure,—chastisements for sin with which their conscience testifies that they have been chargeable,—it is not necessary for imparting to them the good hope of forgiveness, and for restoring to them their spiritual comfort and peace, that their outward condition should undergo a change,—that their afflictions should cease,—that all their former comforts should be restored. If their conscience has been burdened with sin, whereby they have been brought into darkness and depression, the great sacrifice is still near and still available; and, looking again to it by faith, and confessing over it all their iniquity, and all their transgression in all their sin, they may again be quickened to light and life, and made to rejoice in a sense of God's forgiving mercy, even though their tribulations still abound.

Afflictions which to God's people of old were tokens of the divine displeasure, and the removal of which could alone fully restore their soul to confidence and comfort, may now be to the children of God tokens of their adoption,—proofs of their heavenly Father's love and faithfulness. To them, therefore, the promise is fulfilled, as it could not be to the Jewish captives of old. Even to them, as we have seen, it was very precious, and gave them to feel in their experience, and perhaps to their astonishment, that the gracious presence of God might be largely enjoyed even in exile and among the heathen. Still, however, they wept when they thought of Zion. Their restoration to Jerusalem was still necessary fully to re-assure their heart, and to enable them to say, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with

me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." But believers now may, and do frequently enjoy a sense of God's presence most fully and largely in seasons of privation and sore trial. He is at all times their sanctuary. But it is often at such times that they feel as if the way into the holiest of all were more open, and their access to it more free. The truths and promises of God's Word will then come to them with unusual power and freshness. In the midst of worldly perplexities, and while experiencing the uncertainty of worldly enjoyments, there will often be awakened in their minds a deeper sense of the divine goodness, and a stronger confidence in the wisdom of the divine appointments, than they ever felt when their comforts were most abundant, and their prospects most promising. In sickness and solitude, when "wearisome nights" have been appointed them, how often will their spirits be refreshed by the recollection of truths which not only prove seasonable, but, though well known and familiar to them, come with a meaning and a preciousness altogether new! And so of all the diversified trials of life. For every such trial the Word of God has an appropriate promise, a suitable word of comfort; and it is by the Spirit's gracious application of the truth to believers, in the season of their need, that they are brought nearer to God, and are made more profoundly acquainted with the unsearchable riches of his grace and mercy than they would otherwise have been. He does frequently bring them "into the wilderness;" but it is to "speak comfortably" to them, and to give them their "vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope." And how should this consideration reconcile them to all his dispensations! and how powerfully should it inculcate upon them the necessity of so living by faith on Christ, so seeking habitually to be near God, that when trials come, they may reckon with confidence on his being a very present help, even a little sanctuary, in all the circumstances in which they may be placed!

LII.

CHRIST THE GOODLY CEDAR.

EZEKIEL XVII. 22-24.

THE expression in the 22d verse, "I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it," obviously refers to the same or a similar act, done by some one else, as previously described. And this act we find thus described at the 3d verse, "Thus saith the Lord God; A great eagle with great wings, long-winged, full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar: he cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants." Whatever, then, may be the meaning of what the eagle is here represented as doing, Jehovah declares, in the passage we are about to consider, that he himself would do. "I also," he says, "will take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it." And we are not left to guess or be in doubt as to the meaning of the parable of the great eagle cropping the highest branch of the cedar, as recorded in the 3d and following verses; for God himself explained the parable to his prophet in the 12th and following verses. There Ezekiel was commanded to say to the rebellious house of Judah, "Know ye not what these things mean? . . . . Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon." The great eagle, then, was Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon; and the highest branch which he cropped from the cedar

of Lebanon was Jehoiachin the king of Judah, whom he carried to Babylon,—Ezekiel himself being one of the captives who were carried away at the same time. But this great eagle having thus cropped off the top of the young twigs of the highest branch of the cedar, and set it in a city of merchants, even Babylon, is represented also as taking of the seed of the land, and planting it in a fruitful field, where, however, as foretold in the subsequent verses, it was to wither and be rooted out. And this part of the parable is explained in the 13th and following verses, where it is said of the king of Babylon, "He hath taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him; . . . that the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand."

This, it will be observed, is represented as the actual state of things at the moment that the prophet was speaking,—that is, as may be gathered from the dates given in this book, about seven years after the captivity of Jehoiachin, and about four years before the final destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. And at that period the state of things was precisely what is here described. Nebuchadnezzar had taken Jehoiachin, the king of Judah, and carried him to Babylon, and he had set Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, upon the throne of Judah,—not, however, as an independent sovereign, but as his vassal, having made him swear by the Lord God of Israel that he would rule over Judah in accordance with the will of Nebuchadnezzar, his master. This was, indeed, making Judah a base kingdom, its king being subject to the will of a heathen prince. But it was the only condition on which the victorious and haughty Nebuchadnezzar would allow it to stand at all; and so long as Zedekiah was faithful to his oath, steadfast to the terms of the covenant on which the king of Babylon had set him on the throne, he was permitted to rule the kingdom without interference. But the prophet proceeds to foretell, at the 15th verse, as a thing already done, what was very soon to take place,—namely, that Zedekiah was to rebel, and endeavour to throw off the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, by applying to Egypt for help, breaking the oath which he had sworn in the name of the Lord God of Israel. By this act of perfidy, he was to add greatly to his guilt in the sight of God, and was to be given up, therefore, to the vengeance of the king

of Babylon: "As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. . . . As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head. And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me. And all his fugitives, with all his bands, shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds: and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken it." And so, accordingly, it came to pass; for when Jerusalem was broken up by the army of the Chaldeans, all Zedekiah's army was scattered from him,—he himself, when attempting to escape, was taken, as in a net, and they "put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon."

It was thus that when the great eagle, the king of Babylon, took the highest branch of the cedar, that is, the royal house of David, and cropped off the top, the then reigning king of Judah, and set it, it was only that it might "wither in the furrows where it grew." It was for the punishment of the sins of king and people that David's house was to be brought to a low estate, —so low as apparently to be beyond recovery or revival. Its decay was to go farther than even Nebuchadnezzar himself originally contemplated. He would willingly, for the gratification of his own ambition, have permitted the kingdom of Judah to stand, provided it had remained in a state of vassalage to him. But this could not be. Though Nebuchadnezzar was employed as an instrument to execute God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem, yet because he did not mean so, neither was it in his heart to think so, but in his pride and presumptuous defiance of God he did what he did, therefore his very victory over Judah was to be the ultimate and irretrievable ruin of his own kingdom. God was to be glorified by taking vengeance on Babylon, even "the vengeance of his temple." But he was to display his supremacy and faithfulness still more gloriously, in reviving the decayed top of the cedar which had withered and well-nigh perished under the rude setting or planting of the king

of Babylon: "Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it." So the great eagle, the king of Babylon, had done, first, when he carried Jehoiachin captive into a land of traffic, and set him in a city of merchants; and, secondly, when he placed Zedekiah on the throne of Judah, intending that he should reign there, on condition, however, that he, Zedekiah, should do homage to Nebuchadnezzar for his throne. But in neither case did the planted cedar thrive. Jehoiachin lingered out a forty years' captivity in Babylon, for though in his latter days he was kindly entreated by a successor of Nebuchadnezzar's, yet he was a dethroned and captive monarch still,—and so he lived and died. And with regard to Zedekiah, he did by his perfidy disappoint the hopes and wound the pride of the king of Babylon, so that in his thirst for vengeance, and in his defiance of the God of Israel, he carried away the king as a captive and a traitor, destroyed Jerusalem, and plundered and burned the sacred edifice which had once been the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory.

Thus the great eagle and the top of the highest branch of the cedar which he cropped off, did but mutually contribute to each other's ruin. But in the passage under consideration, Jehovah says, "I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it;" and though nothing more had been said, we might have concluded, at least, that in the fulfilment of this promise, the sovereignty, and wisdom, and power of God were to be gloriously displayed, in contrast with the folly, and impotency, and utter helplessness of man. We might have concluded, even without any farther explanation, that if Jehovah himself was to take of the branch of the cedar and to plant it, withered and decayed as it appeared to be, it would assuredly grow up, and be exalted in height above all the trees of the field, so that all the fowls of heaven would make their nests in its boughs, and under his branches should all the beasts of the field lodge, and in its shadow should dwell all great nations. This is the language in which we find a mighty monarch described in a subsequent chapter,—a monarch who was, nevertheless, doomed to destruction. And how much more might we expect the description to be applicable to the branch of Jehovah's planting,—even that great monarch who was to sit on the throne

of David, and reign over the house of Israel and Judah for ever! And so, accordingly, it is expressly declared in the passage under consideration: "I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it: I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent."

This figurative representation of the lowly and humble condition in which Christ was to appear is not peculiar to this passage. In the 11th chapter of Isaiah, and repeatedly elsewhere, he is foretold as a rod, or sprout, from the stem of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots; and in the 53d chapter of the same prophet it is said of him, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground;"—descriptions which indicate at once the decayed state to which the royal house of David was to be reduced, and the obscurity out of which Messiah was to arise. But that obscurity was to render his exaltation the more glorious, as the passage under consideration also announces: "I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent;" and what this mountain was is explained in the next clause, "In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it." This could be no other than Zion. As a mountain, indeed, Zion was not the height of Israel; for as mere mountains there were many far more lofty. But Zion was truly the height of Israel, inasmuch as "the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation." "Beautiful for situation," says the psalmist, "the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion." And again, "The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills?"—that is, why do ye boast or exult in your height?—"this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever." Zion thus became the type and title of the Church; and, therefore, the figurative language in the passage under consideration is equivalent to what is said of Messiah in the 2d Psalm, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." In the same figurative language, the passage we are now considering proceeds to set forth the gradual manifestation of the power of Christ in establishing and extending his kingdom, gathering into it his redeemed people, and dispensing to them the benefits and blessings of his

salvation: "In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar; and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing: in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell."

Nothing could express more emphatically than this figure does the glory of Christ as King on Zion, the privileges of those who are the subjects of his kingdom, and the extension of the kingdom itself till it shall ultimately embrace all the kingdoms of the earth. He appeared at first in lowliness and obscurity,—a tender plant,—a root out of a dry ground. But he soon appeared as a goodly cedar, bringing forth boughs, and bearing fruit; and all who betook themselves to him found a secure shelter under his branches, and abundance of food in his fruit. The day of Pentecost bore witness to the faithfulness of this prophecy, when thousands found themselves to be exposed naked and defenceless to divine wrath, and found in Christ "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest,"—and felt, moreover, that they were thirsty and faint, as well as naked, till Christ became to them "as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." These, however, were only thousands,—easily numbered. But the prophecy speaks of the universality of the blessings which these thousands were made partakers of; for under this goodly cedar "shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell." But this, too, is in progress of fulfilment, and not the less surely that it is gradual, and, as we may sometimes be disposed to think, slow. The Church was taught, from the beginning, to expect that the ingathering of the world to the worship and service of the living and the true God would be a gradual and necessarily a slow thing; for how but gradually and slowly could the Church suppose that the promise to Abraham, then old and childless, would be fulfilled, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed?" The passage under consideration teaches the same truth; for the figure employed does itself necessarily imply that the thing foretold could be brought about only by a gradual process. So it was with the manifestation of Christ personally, for he grew up from infancy to manhood, and even then he was cut down, and left, as men thought, to wither and to die. And our Lord himself has, in like manner, taught his people to expect that the

extension of his kingdom was certainly to be gradual, and might, in their estimation, appear very slow; for, in illustration of this very truth, we find him employing a parable which in substance is the same with that in the passage before us: "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

But however slow this process may be, it is sure and continuous: sure, for the cedar is of Jehovah's planting; and continuous or uninterrupted, for it is a growing cedar, extending the shelter of its boughs to fowl of every wing, and yielding fruit for the sustenance of all who seek to dwell under its shadow. The fulfilment of this prediction does, of course, necessarily imply the subjugation of all the kings and kingdoms of the earth that would "set themselves .... against the Lord and against his anointed." And so it is repeatedly and very explicitly declared in Scripture. "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles," says the psalmist, "shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him." And they who refuse to do so are thus solemnly warned: "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." In accordance with these predictions, the passage under consideration concludes, in the same figurative language that is employed throughout, with predicting the subjugation of all the kings and kingdoms of the earth to Messiah. Christ himself, as King on Zion, being set forth as the goodly cedar, springing from an apparently dry and decayed root, the kings of the earth, in their boasted strength and glory, are represented also as trees flourishing in seeming height and freshness; and their subjugation to Christ, and their acknowledgment of his supremacy, is thus emphatically foretold: "All the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I Jehovah have spoken and have done it."

The passage before us, then, is one among many in Scripture which sets before us, in figurative but most expressive language, the great work of Messiah. It presents to us, first, Christ in the lowliness of his humiliation, and in the glory of his exaltation; second, the gradual extension of his kingdom, by the ingathering of his people into it, to be put in possession of the inestimable blessings which he has procured for them; and, third, the final triumph of that kingdom over all the power that has hitherto opposed, and apparently retarded its progress. And how full of interest and of instruction should the prediction be to us, now that it has been so largely fulfilled! It was spoken originally for the comfort and encouragement of the Church in a season of great distress and depression; and we cannot doubt that it did revive the faith and hope of God's people, and minister largely to their consolation, though there was much in the language of the prediction which they could not fully comprehend. They had already seen the house of David reduced to a very low estate, and they were plainly taught to expect that it was to be brought lower still. This prediction taken by itself could afford them no comfort. It was fitted to depress them more. The only ground on which they could be reconciled to such a discouraging prospect was, that it served, in the way of contrast, to bring out more fully the surpassing glory which yet awaited David's house, when a tender one of that decayed tree should be planted by the hand of Jehovah himself in the mountain of the height of Israel. And, no doubt, this contrast would serve greatly to enlarge their conceptions of the glory of Messiah's person and kingdom. But still, how far short must they have come of understanding the full import of the prediction, or of drawing from it all the encouragement and consolation which it is fitted to impart, now that it has been interpreted by the fulfilment. The very humiliation of David's house, which the Church of old could have borne to contemplate only because it was necessary for the full manifestation of the glory to which it was afterwards to be exalted, is in itself now the main source of consolation to believers.

That humiliation was at its lowest point when Christ, the rightful heir of David's throne, appeared; for he appeared as "a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." To the carnal eye he had no form nor comeliness, neither beauty that men should

desire him; he was "despised and rejected of men," even of those who were his own, and to whom he would have fulfilled the very promise in the passage which we are considering, and all the promises which had, from time to time, revived the hope and refreshed the heart of their fathers in times of trouble; and not only was he rejected, but crucified and put to death by those who ought to have recognised him as their rightful sovereign. And yet is it not to Christ, in this the depth of his humiliation, that believers now look for their chief consolation? In seasons of doubt and depression, when a deep sense of sin on the one hand, and a solemn apprehension of the divine holiness and rectitude on the other, fill their minds with fear and misgiving, do not their thoughts naturally go out towards Christ, as he is represented in Scripture during his sojourn on earth? Do they not try to conceive of him as he then appeared, "meek and lowly in heart," submitting to privation, and toil, and sore travail, for the relief of the poor, and the weary, and the heavy laden, speaking comfort to the sorrowful, and encouragement to the humble and downcast in spirit, proclaiming to all the glad tidings of salvation, even the promise of eternal life to as many as should believe in him, and at last laying down his life, that his promise might be fulfilled?

Is it not thus that believers often endeavour, for the relief of their straitened spirits, to conceive of the Saviour in all his gentleness, compassion, and tenderness, as manifested in the days of his flesh? And is it not while exercised with such thoughts about Christ, that they often feel their faith in him strengthened, and their hearts re-assured towards God? And if the Church now enjoys greater advantages than the Church of old, in regard to the instruction and encouragement to be drawn from the humiliation of Christ, so, in like manner, in regard to his exaltation. The passage we are considering, expressive and full of meaning as it was to those for whose consolation it was first spoken, must have conveyed to them a comparatively imperfect idea of what it conveys now, when read by the light which its fulfilment has cast upon it; for to us it sets forth Christ as Mediator, exalted by the right hand of God to the throne of glory, invested with all power in heaven and on earth, reigning as King in Zion and King of nations, and determining all things

for the accomplishment of his mediatorial work. The prediction before us unfolds also larger and more glorious views of the kingdom of Christ than it did, or could do, to the Church of old. While it opens up to us the prospect of a spiritual kingdom, which will one day be universal, it conveys also much information respecting the privileges and responsibilities of Christ's people. It intimates, from the very nature of the figure employed, that the progress of that kingdom is to be gradual; and so we have seen it to be in the actual fulfilment of the prediction.

But we cannot think of this without being reminded that the gradual nature of this progress is connected with the means, or method, or instrumentality which Christ has been pleased to appoint for the establishment of his kingdom. That instrumentality is the co-operation of his own people,—the communication of the Gospel by those who know and believe it, to those who do not know it, in all the countries and kingdoms of the earth, and through every successive generation of the children of men. Christ has not employed angels, as he could easily have done if he had chosen, to carry his message of peace to the nations. He has chosen men to this honourable office,—redeemed men,—those who have themselves been set free from the bondage of sin and Satan, that they may have the honour and the privilege of carrying to others who are enslaved still, as they themselves once were, the glad tidings of life and liberty. It is a privilege,—a great and glorious privilege,—whatever professing Christians may think of it. And those who feel it to be so will admire the grace and wisdom manifested in the gradual progress of Christ's kingdom, in so far as provision is thereby made for affording them an opportunity of being fellow-workers together with Christ in advancing his cause. But the privilege carries with it great responsibility. If Christ's professing people are the instruments which he has chosen to employ for the extension of his kingdom, they must conclude that the progress of that kingdom will, in some measure, correspond with the zeal, and ardour, and diligence with which they do their part. They cannot expect that the work should go on if they are idle. And if, at any time, therefore, they should be disposed to become impatient, or should be discouraged and desponding, because of the slowness with

which the Gospel spreads, let them reflect whether they are not passing sentence on their own indifference, and indolence, and sloth. It is true that they have many and powerful antagonists to encounter. But let them not measure the strength of their enemies by their own weakness. They are but the instruments; another hand uses them. They are but the means; the power resides elsewhere, even with Him who is "the King of glory," "the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." Hitherto, the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the mighty men, have been too often arrayed in hostility to the cause of Christ. But they cannot prevail. They cannot uproot the goodly cedar which Jehovah's own right hand hath planted, nor prevent it so spreading as to afford shelter to all fowl of every wing; for "all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it."

But while the passage before us thus opens up to the contemplation of the Church very sublime views of the glory of Christ, and of the final subjugation of all other rule, and authority, and powers to his, it suggests also the momentous question, whether we ourselves, personally and individually, really belong to his kingdom,—whether we have sought or found shelter under the branches of the goodly cedar. Many are accustomed, I suspect, to measure the extension of Christ's kingdom by the spread of nominal Christianity,—that is, to reckon as subjects of his kingdom all who profess to believe Christian truth, and who observe Christian ordinances. Such, at least, seems to be the idea which is expressed when we speak of a Christian community or a Christian nation. It can require, however, no argument to show that such an estimate of the real progress of the kingdom of Christ were a very false one. Everybody who has any right apprehension at all of what it is to be a Christian will readily admit this when it is distinctly stated. If, then, it be so, that nominal Christianity may exist where the kingdom of Christ has not been really established, the question becomes just the more urgent, whether we belong to that kingdom, and are actually in possession of its benefits and blessings, as they are figu-

ratively set forth in the passage under consideration. There are many benefits of which we may be made partakers in consequence of a Christian profession, while yet we may be utter strangers to the spiritual blessings which belong exclusively to Christ's people.

If the Gospel is generally or extensively professed in the community to which we belong, even though with vast multitudes it may be only professed, not felt, it will be accompanied with outward or temporal benefits in which all will more or less participate. Its truths cannot be frequently read or heard without producing some salutary effect, insensibly it may be, on the sentiments and conduct of those who read and hear them. It will lay upon many restraints which they would not feel in a community of a different character, and by which they will be kept back from practices into which they would otherwise have eagerly run. Its precepts will familiarise many with the obligation of duties,—such as those of beneficence and kindness,—which they would not otherwise have felt; and the poor and destitute may thus experience relief, and a supply of their wants, which, in other circumstances, would not have been afforded them. And if there be in the community any considerable amount of real vital godliness, living Christianity, manifesting itself, as vital godliness will never fail to do, in good works, then a profession of Christianity may be gradually formed or assumed, like any other custom that prevails, and may come to be essential to respectability of character, to the comfort of social intercourse, and to success in the business of the world. And besides these temporal advantages, such a nominal Christianity may seem to its possessors to secure all that they need be anxious about for eternity. It may lull them into a false security. They may fancy that because they are familiar with the statements of divine truth, and are accustomed to hear and speak of the Gospel, and in point of moral character are at least not below the average of their neighbours, therefore they are not only safe, but have as clear evidence of their being so as they can reasonably desire or expect. And should their conscience be at any time wounded, they will find enough in their Christian profession to heal the wound. They will be ready to conclude, therefore, that

thay have become partakers of all the blessings promised in the passage before us,—that they have found shelter under the branches, and sustenance in the fruit of the goodly cedar.

Alas ! if this be all that we have attained to, we are still naked and destitute. We are mistaking the mere temporal advantages which a profession of the Gospel will never fail to confer on a community, for the spiritual blessings which it imparts only to those who believe. The question is, Have we made a profession of Christianity,—not because it is generally professed, and we have grown into it, as we have into a conformity with other opinions and practices which are general, but because of our felt need of the remedy which it offers for all the ills of a fallen and guilty condition? Have we felt it as a real thing that we stand exposed, naked and defenceless, to divine wrath? And have we seen Christ to be the only, and, at the same time, a secure "hiding-place from the wind," and "covert from the tempest?" Have we discovered that no earthly thing can satisfy our hungering, our ceaseless craving after happiness; and that Christ only can give us of the tree of life, that we may eat and live for ever? Have we ceased to expect or to seek for permanent rest or a satisfying portion in this wilderness of sin and suffering? And have we sought to Christ as to "rivers of water in a dry place," and "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," and as our guide to a better country, the land of promise, the rest that remaineth for the people of God? If so, then let us believe that he undertakes for us. He is more willing to receive us under his shelter than we are to seek to it. The whole Scriptures are full of invitations and remonstrances addressed to sinners, to persuade them to return to God, to cease spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not,—to incline their ear and come to him,—to hear that their souls might live. When the Lord himself was among sinners, dealing personally with them every day, manifesting a divine compassion, and exercising a divine power to demonstrate that his compassion was divine, even then his complaint was, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." And the burden of the apostles, that which formed the substance of their commission, was, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though

God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." If, then, it be our heart's desire, above all things, to be thus reconciled to God, let us not doubt that the desire of our heart will be granted to us. Let us believe that Christ is fulfilling in our experience the gracious promise in the passage we have been considering,—even bringing us under the cover of his own righteousness, making us to dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and to abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

LIII.

THE SHEPHERD-KING.

EZEKIEL XXXIV. 23, 24.

We learn from the preceding chapter that intelligence had been brought to the prophet in the land of Babylon, where he dwelt with his brethren in captivity, that Jerusalem had been taken and destroyed. "And it came to pass," says he, at the 21st verse, "in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, The city is smitten." To the carnal and unbelieving among the captives, this must have been astounding intelligence; for though they had often been warned, both before and after their captivity,—first by Jeremiah, and then by Ezekiel,—that Jerusalem was doomed to destruction, and though their own captivity was a sad intimation that the disastrous event was at no great distance, yet, like the residue of their infatuated brethren whom they had left in Judah and Jerusalem, they still clung to the false hopes awakened in their minds by lying prophets, who flattered them with the assurance of a speedy restoration to their country and their privileges. When told, therefore, that Jerusalem had actually been smitten, they must have been ready to surrender themselves to all the recklessness of despair. But even to the believing portion of the captives who formed the true Church, the intelligence communicated to the prophet must have been very painful. They had, indeed, been prepared for it. The

prophet Jeremiah had not only told them of it before they were taken away captive; but after they had been actually carried to Babylon, he wrote a letter to them, guarding them against the delusions of the false prophets who flattered them with a speedy return to the land of their fathers, and assuring them that their captivity was to continue for seventy years. This letter is recorded in the 29th chapter of Jeremiah's prophecies. Ezekiel, too, had addressed to them similar warnings and admonitions; and, moreover, he had been told by express revelation, as recorded in the 24th chapter of this book, that in the day when the Lord should take from the residue of Judah and Jerusalem "their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes," —that is, their city and the temple,—one who escaped from the general destruction should come to him in the land of the captivity, and tell him what had befallen the holy city. This was, no doubt, known to the believing captives, so that they might have been prepared any day to hear that Jerusalem was taken and destroyed. But everybody knows that any bereavement or affliction, however long and certainly it has been anticipated, and however well prepared men may be to meet it, is still severe when it comes; and, therefore, to the believing portion of the captives, the intelligence brought to the prophet, that the city was smitten, must have been very heavy tidings.

For the reproof, then, of the unbelieving, and for the encouragement of the truly contrite and downcast in spirit, the prophet proceeds to explain and to justify God's dealings with Judah and Jerusalem in bringing upon them such a terrible calamity. Towards the conclusion of the preceding chapter, he sets forth the prevailing ungodliness and immorality of the people at large, reckoning up the heinous offences with which they were chargeable,—offences which the law commanded to be punished with death, but which, when they became so common as to be national, and none were found to execute the law, required, for the vindication of the divine rectitude, that God should take the punishment of them into his own hand. And in the chapter before us, the prophet exposes the iniquities of the shepherds,—that is, the kings and rulers of Judah,—their general profligacy, and especially their daring abuse of the power and influence of their office for their own unholy gratification, whereby they en-

couraged and strengthened the ungodly in their iniquity, and brought great calamities on the believing portion of the people, scattering the true flock of God. These were the grounds on which God had long threatened, and at last executed his righteous judgments on Judah and Jerusalem; and there might seem to be but too much reason to fear that he was about to make a full end of them. But even in rebellious and apostate Judah, God had still a flock,—a little flock it might be, as the Church has often been, and sore torn and scattered. Still, it was his flock, his true covenant people; and they were not to be forsaken or forgotten. And, accordingly, the prophet proceeds to assure them of this. As God had taken into his own hand the infliction on the nation at large of the punishment which, under the rule of ungodly kings, false prophets, and apostate priests, had ceased to be executed on individuals as the law required; so he would also take upon himself the office which the rulers of Judah had so grievously perverted and abused,—that of the ingathering and guardianship of his own flock: "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." And then he explains how all this was to be effected, in the verse before us, where Christ is promised, and in the following context, where the glory of Christ's kingdom is set forth: "And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it."

The subject of these verses, then, is a promise of Christ, under the title of David, the shepherd-king of Israel. It will be recollected that Messiah is frequently foretold, in the writings of the prophets, under the name of David; and every one acquainted with the Scriptures must see it to be a name alike appropriate and significant. To the Church in Ezekiel's time, that name must have been peculiarly expressive and full of meaning. They would readily understand it as denoting one of the seed of David according to the flesh; for they were familiar with the Scripture mode of speaking, whereby the name of the father is given to a son or descendant. They themselves, as a people, bore the name

of their father, being usually called Israel or Jacob. The prediction, then, was to them an express assurance that a descendant of David, and the rightful heir of his throne, was one day to rule over the house of Israel and of Judah. And, in the circumstances in which they were then placed, this promise, though nothing more had been said in illustration of it, must have been very precious, and fitted to call forth their admiration and gratitude; for the fulfilment of it necessarily implied a wonderful manifestation of the power, and wisdom, and faithfulness of God. They had seen the kings of Judah, the descendants of David, and his successors in the throne, become successively more and more degenerate, till first one, Jehoiachin, and then another, Zedekiah, was not only dethroned, but bound in fetters, and carried to Babylon; while Jerusalem, and the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of the princes, were burned with fire. To all appearance, then, the line of kings descending from David had come to an end. The royal seed had been carried into captivity; and even though it should be preserved and restored, there was no longer a throne for it to occupy. It must have required, therefore, a strong faith on the part of the faithful remnant to believe the promise; and if they did believe it, as I have no doubt they did, they must have believed, also, that there would necessarily be a very glorious display of the character of God, as the sovereign Ruler, the faithful and covenant-keeping God, before another descendant of David could sit on the throne of Israel and Judah.

But the promised king is not merely represented as a descendant of David. He is called David, Jehovah's servant. And this title must have been a fertile subject of devout meditation, and a source of abundant consolation, to the believing, but downcast and sorrowing captives. It would lead their thoughts back to the best and brightest period of their history, when they were ruled over by a man according to God's own heart,—one whom the Lord himself specially selected to be captain of his people Israel, prospering him whithersoever he went, subduing his enemies, the enemies of the Church, under him, making him a name like unto the name of the great men that were in the earth, and putting the fear of him and the dread of him on all the nations that were round about him. Especially, it would remind them

of what David had been honoured to do, for establishing and perpetuating the best and richest privileges of Israel,—his taking Jerusalem and Mount Zion out of the hands of the Jebusites, who had till his time held it in possession,—his pitching a tent or tabernacle there for the permanent abode of the ark of the covenant, an intimation that God had chosen Zion to put his name there,—his making large provision for the erection of the temple, as the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory,—and his being inspired by the Holy Ghost to be the sweet psalmist of Israel,—the writer of those sacred songs which ever have been, and ever will be found to express the feelings of the children of God in every mood and frame of mind. All this must have been brought to the recollection of the people of God, to whom this promise was first addressed. Nor could they fail to remember, also, how the descendants and successors of David did, one after another, degenerate, there being none of whom it was said that they were men after God's own heart, and but few who sought to walk in David's footsteps, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord, till, by their continually accumulating guilt, they brought down the judgment of God upon themselves and their people, to the apparently utter ruin of the nation, and the final overthrow of the throne. And when they thought of all this, they must have felt assured that the promise implied a great deal more than merely the restoration of the kingdom, under such a prince as even the best of David's successors.

The promised Deliverer is called David, Jehovah's servant; and, therefore, he could not be less than David was, even a man after God's own heart. He is promised, moreover, in contrast with the degenerate and apostate kings, who had successively sat on David's throne; and, therefore, the promise implied that he would repair the mischief which they had done in driving out God's people from the heritage of the Lord, and that he would revive all the glories of David's reign. Nay, they were assured that he would accomplish unspeakably more than David ever did. In the verse immediately following, it is said, "And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land; and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." This description of a flock, dwelling in safety under the protection of an ever-watchful

shepherd, might remind the believing captives, to whom it was addressed, of what had been recorded of David while yet a shepherd, keeping his father's flock in the wilderness of Bethlehem, as related by himself to Saul. "Thy servant," said he, "kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock; and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him." This deed of David was a prophetic intimation of what he was to be honoured to accomplish afterwards, when the Lord "took him from the sheepfolds," and "brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance." But how surpassing great is the prophetic intimation here given of Messiah's achievements as the shepherd of Israel, when he is represented as destroying, or causing "the evil beasts to cease out of the land," so that his flock should "dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods;" when they should no more be "a prey to the heathen," neither should "the beasts of the land devour them," but they should "dwell safely," and none should "make them afraid." In the low state to which the Church had been reduced at the time when these prophecies were uttered, how wonderful must it have appeared to the people of God that the house of David should revive, and the kingdom be restored at all! But believing, as they did, that the word of the Lord, as spoken by the mouth of his servant, would assuredly be fulfilled, how must it have revived their hope and awakened their admiration to be told that the future glory of the kingdom was unspeakably to surpass all that had ever been before witnessed,—that the Lord was so to visit and redeem his people, and to raise up "an horn of salvation" for them "in the house of his servant David!"

There can be no doubt, I think, that the Church in Ezekiel's time saw more in these promises than merely the restoration of the temporal kingdom to Israel. To what extent they perceived that spiritual blessings were shadowed forth under the figure of those temporal privileges which had long been to them tokens of the divine favour, we cannot determine. But we must believe, I think, that the meek, the lowly, and the teachable in the Old Testament Church, looked far beyond a temporal inheritance in

their expectations of the blessings of Messiah's kingdom; for of such it was said, "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way:" "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and his covenant, to make them know it." And if so, we cannot set limits to the amount of knowledge which the Spirit might impart to them concerning the person, and character, and work of Messiah. But still the promise, as a prediction of Christ and a description of his kingdom, is to us, in point of clearness and fulness, what it was not to the Old Testament Church. The New Testament has so explained and opened up predictions like that before us, and we are so familiar with the representation of David as a type of Messiah, that we cannot hear the name mentioned without being reminded of Him who under that name is here foretold. The typical resemblance, too, which David bore to Christ, has been fully explained and illustrated by the actual manifestation of Messiah, by what has been revealed of his person and character, and by what he did and endured for the accomplishment of his mediatorial work. Like David, he was chosen out of the people, and raised from obscurity and lowliness still deeper than David's. He was subjected to reproach, and persecutions, and cruelties, compared with which all that David suffered at the hand of his enemies were light and trivial. The title of the "man after God's own heart," which was given to David, was, in its highest sense, applicable only to Christ; and to him it was applicable on other grounds besides that of his perfect personal righteousness. He was, indeed, the man after God's own heart, inasmuch as he "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;" he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." But he was the man after God's own heart, because he wrought out a perfect righteousness for others, satisfying, in their name and on their behalf, the demands of law and justice; so that God, as the Lawgiver and Judge, could, consistently with his perfections, carry out his gracious purpose of saving sinners.

David took Jerusalem and Mount Zion out of the hands of the Jebusites, erected there his own throne as king of Israel, and provided also for its becoming the dwelling of the Lord of glory, where God condescended to take up his abode in the midst of his people. Christ had to deliver his Church, the true Zion, the

spiritual Jerusalem, out of the hands of still more formidable foes. He had to despoil Satan of his triumphs,—to take away the captives of the mighty, and deliver the prey of the terrible. And this he did when he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross; and when by his death he destroyed "him that had the power of death," and delivered "them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Christ has thus, by conquest, won Zion for himself, and there he sits King, ruling and defending his people, and conquering all his and their enemies. They do not, indeed, enjoy his bodily presence, as it was once enjoyed, when in his person God did in very deed dwell with man on the earth. But he is present with them by his Spirit, as really as the cloud of glory was present on Mount Zion of old; for when he ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, he received gifts for men, yea, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them. It was said of David, that the fear of him and the dread of him was on all the nations round about him. And this, in a far higher, an infinitely higher sense, has been fulfilled, and is in the way of being every day fulfilled in Christ. He has already gathered into his kingdom innumerable multitudes out of many nations. And every new subject that is added to his kingdom is a trophy of his power; for that subject was originally an enemy, till he found a refuge in the power which he was at first brought to fear and dread. And this fear and dread has been, and still continues to be, laid on many who are not thereby vanquished and subdued,—that is, in other words, convinced, converted, and persuaded to throw down the weapons of their rebellion, and become the willing subjects of Christ's spiritual government. I believe that the very hostility which the cause of Christ has had to encounter at the hand of governments, kingdoms, and individuals, is itself a proof that the fear and dread of Christ was upon them. That hostility is like no other hostility which men are accustomed to manifest against that which they hate. There is a bitterness and an inconsistency in the warfare which they wage against the Redeemer's cause which is quite peculiar. For example, one of the most common and virulent attacks which they make is an attempt to show that the great ruling principle of the life of

Christ's people, namely, love to him, is a very fanatical, and, therefore, a very silly and contemptible thing. But it never seems to occur to them, that if it be so contemptible, surely it is not worthy of their elaborate efforts to put it down, and that by such efforts they are plainly contradicting themselves, by virtually acknowledging that the subject is far more important than they pretend to think it. No, no; it is not contemptible. With all the levity and affected contempt which either individuals or governments pretend to manifest towards the Gospel, when it really appears in its power, becoming a living, energetic, and indomitable principle of action, they are secretly afraid of it,—afraid that it may be true,—that, after all, Christ may be what the Scriptures represent, King of kings, and Lord of lords,—and that all who do not submit to him as his willing and obedient subjects, must at last meet him as their righteous and righteously offended Judge. And it is this secret dread that gives increased bitterness to their hostility. That hostility has been manifested in all ages of the Christian Church; and manifold are the cruelties which it has inflicted on the followers of Christ, not only in the case of those who have been persecuted to bonds, and imprisonment, and death, but of many who have privately endured what is hardly less severe, even frowns, and displeasure, and taunts, and alienation of affection, on the part of those whom they loved, and by whom they ought to have been loved and encouraged.

And is this, it may be asked, consistent with the prediction in the passage before us, where it is declared of the subjects of Messiah's kingdom, that "they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid?" Perfectly consistent. The promise in the context refers to blessings infinitely better than any temporal privileges which Christ's people could enjoy, though they were gathered out of all the kingdoms where they are found to be sojourning, formed into a separate kingdom by themselves, hedged in and protected from all external assault and violence, and permitted literally to sit, each under his vine and under his fig-tree, without any to make him afraid. The great Shepherd of Israel needs not so to separate his flock from the rest of mankind, in order to preserve and provide for them. Such a state of separation, though more palpable to the senses, would, in reality, be but a very imperfect manifestation of that marvellous grace, and

wisdom, and power, which he now exercises towards his Church, in ruling over his people, and defending them from all their enemies. For be it remembered that it is not temporal comforts that he has promised to secure to them, nor is it from temporal calamities that he has engaged to exempt them. On the contrary, he permits, nay, he appoints such calamities to befall them, as part of the gracious discipline whereby he moulds them into a conformity to his own image, and trains them to a meekness for participating in his own glory. But however much the enemies of Christ's people may harass and disturb them, and whatever temporal suffering they may inflict, they cannot, as of old, drive them out "from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord," or deprive them of the comforting sense of his presence; for wherever they are, in the wilderness and woods, shut out from the community of the faithful, or in the full enjoyment of Christian privileges, holding communion with those who, like themselves, fear the Lord, and speak often one to another of his wonderful works, he is ever near them. And so he will be, daily gathering in and preserving those whom the Father has given him, till the fear of him and the dread of him, in a saving and sanctifying sense, shall be upon all the nations,—when his name shall be great from the rising to the setting sun, and when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

This passage, then, as a prediction of Christ and of the blessings of his kingdom, though very plain and very precious even to the Old Testament Church, has a fulness of meaning which could not formerly be seen in it, now that it has been explained and illustrated by the clearer revelation of the New Testament. And should not the consolation, then, which it is fitted to impart to the people of God, be, in like manner, more abundant? That it is mainly designed to minister to the comfort and encouragement of the Church is obvious from the very language employed: "I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd." No language could more emphatically express God's gracious care of his people, than that which represents him as placing them under a shepherd who should feed and guide them. Such language was peculiarly expressive

and full of meaning to the people of Israel, inasmuch as they knew well, from the character and climate of the country which they inhabited, what care, and tenderness, and labour were required of a faithful shepherd, where, at certain seasons, frequent changes were necessary in order to find fresh pasture, and where the flocks, often removed far from the habitations of men, were exposed to the ravages of wild beasts. Accordingly, we find that this language is frequently employed in Scripture to express the unceasing care and kindness which God exercised towards his people, either immediately, by his own gracious interposition, or by the instrumentality of those whom he appointed, as he did David, "to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance." He condescended, indeed, to call himself the Shepherd of Israel; and by that title we find his people addressing him, either when they would express their confidence in his continued grace and goodness, or when they would, with more than usual urgency, plead his interposition in a time of great tribulation, as if it were the title which he would especially own and vindicate. Thus we find the psalmist saying, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters." And, in the 80th Psalm, at a time, as appears from the Psalm itself, of great disaster and depression to the Church, she thus prayed: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, ... stir up thy strength, and come and save us." As might be expected, then, we find Messiah frequently foretold by the title of the Shepherd of Israel; and care was taken to bring prominently into view the tenderness, as well as the unceasing watchfulness which he should exercise towards his flock: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

Promises like these, from the day that they were uttered, must have ministered largely to the consolation and encouragement of the Church in every age. But they are the property of the Church still, with this incalculable advantage beyond what the Church of old enjoyed, that He to whom the promises referred has appeared, and is every day fulfilling the promises

in the experience of his people. In the course of his personal ministry, Christ did expressly appropriate to himself the title of the Shepherd of Israel,—the good Shepherd, who had not only undertaken to deliver, and defend, and feed his flock, but to die for them. David, the type of Messiah, did once and again peril his life in defence of the flock committed to his charge. But David the antitype, Messiah himself, was required to lay down his life: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." To Christ, therefore, exclusively belongs the name and the office of the Shepherd of Israel. He has taken upon himself the charge of all that concerns the safety and well-being of his people. He employs instruments, indeed, in carrying on his work: for "he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." But all these receive not only their commission and their instructions, but their gifts, also, and their qualifications from him; and from him comes all the efficacy whereby they contribute to the comfort and edification of the flock. He is himself "the chief Shepherd," the "great Shepherd of the sheep." Nor does the appointment of such agents or servants at all interfere with the direct communication between Christ and his flock. They are not mediators to transact with him on behalf of his people. They are employed to direct the flock to the chief Shepherd himself, with whom they may hold direct communication, and from whom they may receive the supply of all their necessities. And he knows them all, be they ever so obscure in the sight of the world. "He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them."

Of every individual, then, of Christ's flock, it may be said that he is as much the object of the chief Shepherd's care, as if he had no other to care for. And it cannot be otherwise; for he is God. But he is man also; and it is this consideration that gives inexpressible tenderness to all the gracious promises addressed in Scripture to the people of God. These promises, as we have seen, were very precious to the Church at all times. But now they have been addressed to us by the lips of Him who took our nature with all its sinless infirmities. They come to us as the

words of one possessed, like ourselves, of human sympathies and feelings,—one who was made in all things like unto his brethren, for the very purpose of giving us the assurance that he is merciful, and faithful in transacting all that concerns his people,—one who is touched with the feeling of their infirmities, being in all points tempted like as they are, yet without sin; and who on this very account, because he "suffered being tempted,..... is able to succour them that are tempted." It is this consideration that gives to all the declarations of Scripture regarding the divine compassion, a force and a tenderness which they could not have before Christ appeared, God manifest in the flesh. And if this consideration be borne in mind, can true believers doubt that they have the sympathy of the Saviour under all their trials and afflictions? And with this sympathy, can they yield to fretfulness and impatience under their trials? For let them remember that it is not the sympathy of one who has nothing else to give them, as in the case of their fellow-men, who may pity, but cannot help them. Their Shepherd is also their King. "I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them." In him, a divine compassion is united with a divine power. He is not only their Prince or gracious Sovereign, able to rule in them and over them, and to determine all that personally concerns them;—he is also the Prince of the kings of the earth, the sovereign Ruler over all, exercising an almighty control over every thing that can affect them from without,—overruling all events for the divine glory and the good of his people,—restraining and finally conquering all their enemies. If, then, with the assurance of his sympathy under their afflictions, they do not experience the relief which they might naturally wish for, must they not conclude that he sees it to be for their good, whatever they may be disposed to think, that their afflictions should not be removed? Would not his sympathy prompt him to grant them the relief that they long for? And if, therefore, that relief be withheld, must it not be because he has some gracious purpose to accomplish by means of the affliction which could not be so wisely accomplished without it? But he is ready to give them the grace, not only that is needful to bear the trial, but that will enable them to improve it. And ought not this to satisfy them? If it does not, are they not quarrelling with the

arrangements which the good Shepherd has made for the welfare of his flock,—arrangements which he has announced to all who enter into his fold; for he has warned all that affliction is part of his appointed discipline? The verses we have been considering are, indeed, full of consolation; but that consolation will be experienced only in proportion as we have willingly surrendered ourselves to Christ's disposal. Let us see to it, then, that the question be determined, whether we are any thing more than nominally of his flock,—whether we have been made willing in a day of his power,—whether he has subdued us to himself, and is ruling us by his Word and Spirit; for if not, then we have neither part nor lot in this promise, nor in fact can we honestly desire to have. Whatever be our outward profession, the language of our heart still is, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

LIV.

A PLANT OF RENOWN.

EZEKIEL XXXIV. 29-31.

THIS passage is the conclusion of a promise which begins at the 11th verse of this chapter; and to see the full import of that promise, we must bear in mind the circumstances in which it was given. The prophet himself, and his brethren among whom he exercised his office, had already been more than twelve years in captivity in the land of Babylon. During that period, a hope was cherished by many of the captives, perhaps more or less by the greater part of them, that they would soon be restored again to their country, where those of their brethren who had not been carried away in the first captivity still enjoyed, to some extent, their wonted privileges. But at the time that the prediction in this chapter was uttered, intelligence had been brought to the prophet that Jerusalem was smitten; or, in other words, that the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and the houses of the great men in Jerusalem, were burned to the ground, and that the residue of the people were to be carried into captivity. All ground of hope, then, of a speedy restoration was taken away,—at least from the truly humble and spiritual of the captives, those who formed the true Church; for, with regard to the worldly and carnal-minded, it appears that they still flattered themselves with the expected fulfilment of what had been predicted by false prophets, who promised them a speedy return from Babylon to their own land. The condition of the Church, then, the true

Church, was very deplorable, and is described in very affecting language in a preceding part of this chapter. The people of God are represented as scattered sheep, having no shepherd;—as having become "meat to all the beasts of the field when they were scattered,"—as wandering "through all the mountains, and upon every high hill,"—yea, as a flock "scattered upon all the face of the earth," none searching or seeking them out. And it must be remembered that this language implied a great deal more than the mere temporal calamity of being driven from their country, and reduced to the state of oppressed exiles in a foreign land. That calamity involved the loss of their spiritual privileges. The possession of the land sworn unto their fathers had long been a token of the divine favour, or at least a proof that God had not utterly cast them off. By their very captivity they lost this token; and in that captivity they had a very plain intimation of the divine displeasure. They were, moreover, removed from the land where alone they could have full and free access to God, in the ordinances which he had himself appointed, and in the place which he had chosen to put his name there. And how must this privation have been aggravated by the heavy tidings which were brought to Ezekiel, that the city was smitten,—that the temple was laid in ashes! It is true that the house of the Lord had long ceased to be what it once was; and these very captives must have seen it profaned and polluted by the establishment of idolatrous practices within the precincts of its very courts. Still, so long as it stood, they would naturally entertain the hope that it might be cleansed, as it had been once and again before; so that if ever they should be restored to the land of their fathers, they might find the place where they and their fathers had worshipped still open, and still free to them to offer their sacrifices and their burnt-offerings,—the tribute of their thanksgiving and praise. But now that the heavy tidings had been brought to them of the utter destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple itself, how gloomy must have been the prospect before them! for even if they should return from their captivity, could the land of Judah, waste and desolate as it had become, ever be to them what it had been before?

It was in this low and apparently hopeless state, then, that Ezekiel was commanded to speak good words and comfort-

able words to his brethren in captivity. He had previously described their condition as sheep scattered without a shepherd; and the godly among them, the true Church, did, no doubt, feel that such was their condition. The comfort, therefore, which the prophet was commissioned to minister to them, was a promise expressed in the same figurative language,—namely, that Jehovah would raise up a shepherd to gather his scattered flock; and not only a shepherd,—one who had skill, and patience, and tenderness to gather and watch over them,—but a Shepherd-King,—one who had power to carry into effect all that his skill, and patience, and tenderness might suggest on behalf of his flock: "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it." This, of course, referred to Christ; and the title here given him, namely, that of a Shepherd-King, is perhaps one of the richest in consolation and encouragement to his people of any to be found in Scripture. And even to the godly captives in Babylon the promise was very precious, though they were not to see the advent of Him in whom it was to be fulfilled. It was an assurance that God in his anger had not forgotten or broken his covenant-promise to Abraham, that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed; and if so, then it was an assurance also to them, that, low as the condition of the Church then was, they were not cast off for ever, inasmuch as the preservation of the Church was necessary for the fulfilment of the promise of Messiah's advent. The prediction then goes on to set forth the peace and prosperity which the Church was to enjoy under the immediate guidance and government of this Shepherd-King, expressed, of course, in figurative language corresponding to that in which the low and calamitous state of the Church had been previously described. The people of God had been represented as a scattered flock, driven from their pastures, the pastures themselves being laid waste and desolate. The promise, therefore, was, that the Lord would restore them to their land, and cause the evil beasts to cease out of it, and make them dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods, and make them and the places round about his hill a blessing, and cause the

shower to come down in his season, even showers of blessing. This promise began to be fulfilled when the Jews returned from their captivity under Zerubbabel, the representative of the house of David, and continued to be partially fulfilled in the experience of the godly and believing among the Jews down to the time of Christ. But it was not their return to their own land, and the recovery of their former temporal possession, which of itself constituted the fulfilment of the promise. Their restoration to Judah, and their rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, was important only as being necessary for the recovery of their spiritual privileges; and it was in the renewed enjoyment of these that the promise was fulfilled to them. Even these were but very partially enjoyed up to the coming of Christ, when the privileges and blessings of his Church ceased to be necessarily connected with or depended on any temporal condition whatever. But the prediction of the blessings of Gospel times, if it was to be intelligible and consoling to the Jews, especially when in a state of exile and captivity, required to be expressed under the figure of temporal blessings. And such, accordingly, is the language employed in the preceding context, where these blessings are represented as the restoration of the people of God to their own land, where they should no longer be a prey to the heathen, neither should the beast of the land devour them. And this description of spiritual peace and comfort is completed by the words of the passage before us, "And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more."

The expression, "plant of renown," has been understood by some commentators as a name or title of Christ, whereby his coming or appearing is here foretold. And, considered in itself, the expression may admit of this interpretation, inasmuch as we find Messiah repeatedly promised and spoken of under a similar figure. He was foretold by the prophet Isaiah as a "rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch" growing out of his roots. In the prophecies of Jeremiah we find him once and again promised as "a righteous Branch" that was to be raised up unto David. And in the book of Zechariah he is spoken of as Jehovah's servant, "The Branch." It might naturally be concluded, there-

fore, at first sight, that the expression, "a plant of renown," is in like manner to be understood as a name or title of Messiah. But from the manner and connection in which it is introduced, it cannot, I think, be so understood. Christ had already been foretold, in the preceding context, in very plain language, so plain as to be hardly figurative, being set forth as David the servant of the Lord,—the Shepherd of his flock,—the Prince or King of his people; and we cannot suppose that, in a subsequent part of the same passage, he should be foretold by a title more figurative, and therefore less clear and explicit. Besides, it is obvious that the prophet, having foretold Christ as the Shepherd-King of Israel, proceeds, in the immediately following verses, to predict the blessed change which was to be wrought in the condition of the Church under the government of David her prince, and that this prediction of the peace and prosperity of the people of God is continued to the end of the chapter. It appears to me, therefore, that those commentators are right who consider the expression as referring, not directly to Christ personally, but to the blessings of Christ's kingdom,—those spiritual blessings which his people were to enjoy independently of all outward circumstances, and in spite of all the hostility of their enemies. And, according to this interpretation, this passage will be found to be not only in accordance with the preceding context, but full of important instruction.

The blessings which Messiah was to procure for his people are set forth under the figure of the restoration of the land to beauty and fertility, from a state of desolation and barrenness: "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season: there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land." And in farther illustration of this happy state of things, it is added, in the same figurative language, "I will raise up for them a plant," or, as the word signifies, "a plantation of renown,"—an abundance of trees yielding their fruit,—so that "they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land." Elsewhere we find a similar figure employed in reference to the Church, but differently applied. Thus, in the 60th chapter of Isaiah, it is said, "Thy people also

shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified." And again, in the 61st chapter, they shall be called "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." In these passages, the people of God are themselves represented as a plantation, or trees of God's planting. But, in the passage under consideration, a plantation is represented as provided for them, where they should enjoy food, and shelter, and security, instead of the danger, desolation, and famine to which they had formerly been exposed. And this interpretation is confirmed by other passages in a subsequent part of this same prophet's book. Thus, in the 36th chapter, where the very same subject is spoken of as in the chapter before us,—namely, the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant or Gospel times, when the Lord was to sprinkle his people with clean water, and they should be clean,—it is said, "I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen..... And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, and desolate, and ruined cities, are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen, that are left round about you, shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate." And in the 47th chapter, where the most prosperous state of the Church, in regard to the enjoyment of spiritual blessings, is described, the same figurative language is employed in the description: "And by the river, upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine." The passage before us, then, like the passages now quoted, is a representation of the abundance of spiritual food which the Shepherd and Prince of Israel was to provide for his people, and is a continuation, in the same figurative language, of the promise contained in the preceding context: "And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land..... And I will raise up for them a plantation of renown,"

—or, I will plant for them a garden of renown,—"and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land."

In one of the passages in this same book to which I referred, it will have been observed, I dare say, that the land, after the restoration of the captives from Babylon, is compared to the garden of Eden. Similar comparisons are elsewhere to be found in Scripture. Thus the plain of Jordan, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, is compared to "the garden of the Lord," —that is, Eden, the garden of the Lord's planting. The prophet Isaiah was commissioned to comfort Zion, the Church, in her low and desolate state, by assuring her that the Lord would "make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord." And in like manner the prophet Joel, in foretelling the terrible judgments that were coming upon Israel and Judah, and in describing the devastation which these judgments were to produce, represents the land of Canaan, before the judgments came, as like the garden of Eden, and, after the judgments, as utterly naked and desolate. Speaking of the enemies that were to overrun the land, the prophet calls them "a great people and a strong," and proceeds to say of them, in their progress to execute the divine judgment, "A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them."

From the frequency with which the land of Israel and Judah is thus expressly compared to Eden, before the people of that land lost the divine favour, and again after they were restored to it, it has been supposed, and I think on good ground, that in this and in similar passages, there is an allusion to Eden, though it is not expressly mentioned. Eden was in a peculiar sense the plantation of the Lord,—the place where man might enjoy all that was needful for his support, his security, and his happiness; for "the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Here man dwelt so long as he was innocent; and in the beauty, the fertility, and abundance of comfort, with which he was sur-

rounded, he had a permanent and most unequivocal proof of the favour of the Lord God his Creator. But when he sinned, he was driven from Eden, and cast upon the wide world, which was to him comparatively a waste and desolate wilderness; for the solemn sentence had gone forth, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field,"—instead of the fruits of Eden, the trees that were good for food, as well as pleasant to the sight: "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." And how wonderfully like this was the manner of God's dealing with his ancient people, the children of Israel, the family of Abraham his friend! He took them, and bare them "on eagles' wings," and brought them unto himself. He planted for them a garden. He selected for them a land which was the glory of all lands,—"a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey." There they dwelt, and might have continued to dwell, in peace and in safety, surrounded on all sides by proofs of the divine bounty, and tokens of the divine care and watchfulness over them. And while their outward circumstances,—their temporal condition,—did thus bear some analogy or resemblance to that in which man was placed in the garden of Eden, they enjoyed also spiritual privileges,—even a revelation of grace and mercy, whereby provision was made for restoring them to what Adam had forfeited and lost, namely, the enjoyment of the favour and fellowship of God. As a pledge or token of this, he commanded them, saying, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." And he did dwell among them by a visible symbol of his glorious presence,—accepting their sacrifices and their burnt-offerings,—graciously answering them from the holy oracle when they asked counsel of him in times of perplexity and trouble,—granting them the requests which they presented to him in sincerity and truth,—and giving to his servant, the high priest, permission and authority to bless them in the name of the Lord.

But they "forsook God which made them, and lightly

esteemed the Rock of their salvation." They listened, like Adam, to the voice of the tempter, believing his lies in preference to God's truth; for it is testified of them that they "sacrificed unto devils, not to God." And they were punished after the manner in which Adam was. They were made to exchange an Eden for a wilderness. First, their land was smitten "with blasting and mildew." The Lord gave them "cleanness of teeth" in all their cities, and "want of bread" in all their places. The palmer-worm and the locust, the canker-worm and the caterpillar, did eat up every green thing in the land. And when, for all this, they returned not unto the Lord, he sent the sword upon them to avenge the quarrel of his covenant, and delivered them up captives into a foreign land,—to them a wilderness still more desolate than their own land, wasted as it had been. But they were not utterly cast off. God had among them a true covenant people, and for them was still in reserve the restoration of the blessings which had been forfeited, and for a time lost. And as the loss of these blessings was fitly compared to the expulsion of Adam from paradise, so the restoration of them is set forth as the revival of the garden which the Lord God had planted, and in which his people were to dwell in safety, and enjoy peace and plenty: "I will raise up for them a planted place of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land." "And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden." And "the heathen .... shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate."

This figurative, but very expressive language is, of course, to be understood as descriptive of spiritual blessings,—the blessings which David, the servant of Jehovah, the Shepherd and King of Israel, was to procure for and bestow upon his people. Of these blessings some of the children of men had been partakers, even from the beginning, inasmuch as from the beginning there had always been a Church,—some who, through faith in the promised Saviour, found acceptance with God, and became heirs of a heavenly inheritance. And to strengthen their faith in Him who was yet known to them only by promises, and types, or figures, God was pleased to give them peculiar temporal privileges, as pledges or tokens of spiritual blessings, placing them, as we have

seen, in such outward circumstances as did very significantly intimate that provision had been made for restoring to them all that Adam had forfeited and lost. With regard, therefore, to the believing captives in Babylon, to whom the promise was originally addressed, that promise involved their return to the land of their fathers, and the restoration, in some measure, of the land itself to its former fertility and beauty. These temporal privileges had always been inseparably connected in their minds with their spiritual blessings, a sense of God's favour, and the hope of his salvation; and the time was not yet come when the Church could dispense with these outward and palpable tokens of their being in a state of friendship with God. And, accordingly, the promise is expressed as if the blessings included in it consisted solely, or mainly, of temporal peace and prosperity. But so far from such a temporal inheritance being necessary for the full enjoyment of the spiritual blessings here set forth, these blessings were never seen, or understood, or enjoyed in all their fulness, till the time came when the possession of a special worldly inheritance ceased to form any part of the portion secured to the people of God. From the day that the apostles began their public ministry in Jerusalem, it was no longer a question with them, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" and just because they then understood, as it had never been understood before, how Christ had repaired the ruins of the fall, and recovered for his redeemed people all, and unspeakably more than all, that Adam had forfeited and lost.

This truth had been shadowed forth, as we have seen, to the Old Testament Church, by the possession which was secured to them, and by the manner in which God dealt with them. But even that figurative intimation is to us clearer and more significant than it was to them, and no such outward circumstances are any longer necessary for our understanding or enjoying, in all their fulness, the spiritual blessings which are here figuratively set forth. No doubt, the time will come when the temporal condition of the Church will be greatly more peaceful and prosperous than it now is, or has ever been, for the Gospel will assuredly be extended to all nations; and when it is universally professed, and generally believed and felt, the state of society will be very different from what has ever yet been witnessed.

But this temporal peace does not necessarily form a part of the spiritual blessings which the Gospel conveys. It is but the consequence,—the necessary consequence it may be,—of the more extended spread of these blessings; and if at that period the blessings themselves be more largely enjoyed by the Church, it will be not because her outward condition is more secure and peaceful, but because she is visited by more abundant communications of the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, provision is already made for believers understanding and enjoying all the blessings here promised, be their outward condition what it may. Christ has recovered for them the lost Eden,—the garden of Jehovah's planting,—and they may enter in and enjoy its shelter and its abundance. A flaming sword did, indeed, guard its entrance, and kept the way to the tree of life, and that tree none could reach without encountering and bearing its stroke. It turned not aside even at the approach of Him who was Jehovah's shepherd, the man that is his fellow. But neither turned he aside from his gracious purpose. He encountered the sword of justice. It executed upon him, even to the uttermost, the commission which it had received. The way to the tree of life is now open, and whosoever will may take, and eat, and live for ever. And this blessed truth every humble believer knows in his experience, when he finds peace with God through the blood of Christ. He feels that by the sprinkling of that blood his conscience has been pacified. He sees that the law, the terrors of which formerly distracted him, has been fully satisfied, and that the way of his return to God has been thrown open. Formerly, he was an exile from the presence of God,—a homeless wanderer in a world where he once thought he could be happy, but where he found that he toiled only to reap disappointment for his wages, and that it was becoming to him every day more and more a desolate wilderness. Often, perhaps, was he warned of this; but the warning for a time, it may be for a long time, was disregarded, till at length convinced that he was spending his "money for that which is not bread," and his "labour for that which satisfieth not," and that at last he must "lie down in sorrow;" and then, for the first time, was he persuaded to listen to an invitation, which had also, perhaps, been often heard, but unheeded,—even the gracious invitation to return and find

rest in God himself, from whose presence he was a guilty, and, at one time, a willing exile.

And having been made to understand, and persuaded to believe and make trial of this invitation, he began to experience the fulfilment of the gracious promise contained in this passage. He found that not only was access into the divine presence, the way to the tree of life, laid open, but provision made for his dwelling there, even as Adam did in the garden of Eden. He found, and he continues to find more and more, that for the Church, the true spiritual Church, the Lord hath indeed planted a garden, where he has made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. In the discoveries which he makes of himself to his people, and in the communications of his grace, which he imparts to them by his Spirit, in his Word and ordinances, they find every thing to gratify their spiritual taste, and abundantly to supply their spiritual wants. In that Word, and in these ordinances, they find wherewithal to be soothed under sorrow,—to be comforted under affliction,—to be directed in circumstances of perplexity,—to be animated with new vigour for difficult and self-denying duties,—and to be quickened again in seasons of spiritual deadness and depression. It is in his Word and ordinances that God has especially promised to meet with his people; and when they do there meet him, they realise his presence in greater fulness and glory than Adam ever did in the garden of Eden, inasmuch as the revelation of God's character now is unspeakably more glorious than it was or could be before the fall. And so is the condition, in regard to honour and privilege, to which the people of God are exalted, as compared to that in which Adam was originally placed. Christ came that men might not only "have life,"—the life which Adam forfeited and lost,—but "that they might have it more abundantly." And so the whole tenor of Scripture testifies. The redeemed of the Lord are not only his intelligent creatures, renewed again after his image, and made eternally blessed in the enjoyment of his favour and fellowship;—they are represented as one with Christ,—as "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," —as "his body" itself, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all;" and it is declared of them that when, by his grace, they have fought and have overcome, they shall sit down with him on

his throne, even as he also overcame, and is set down with his Father on his throne. And so it is taught in the passage we have been considering, when it is said, "I will raise up for them a planted place of renown." It is in and by his Church that Christ is glorified; and his people are partakers of his glory,—a glory which shall one day be revealed, to the utter confusion of those whose shame and reproach the Church has often borne here, and to the joy and admiration of all God's holy, intelligent creatures. This is the renown which we profess to believe will be ours, when we profess to believe the Gospel. How solemn a thing is it to make such a profession! Have we felt that it is so? and are we careful to bear it in mind, that we may be more and more anxious to walk worthy of our high and holy vocation?

LV.

"I WILL SANCTIFY MY GREAT NAME."

EZEKIEL XXXVI. 21–28.

When Israel first, and Judah afterwards, were carried into captivity,—and especially when Jerusalem and the temple were laid in ruins,—the heathen, by whose victorious armies these desolations were wrought, had a very plausible ground for alleging that the God of Israel was not superior, if, indeed, he was equal to their own gods. This was the opinion which, from the day of Israel's establishment in Canaan, the nations around asserted, and would fain have believed, though they had at times great misgivings on the subject; for God had from the beginning put the fear of Israel and the dread of them on all the inhabitants of Canaan. Still, however, these nations maintained the attitude of defiance to God and his people; and when, at any time, they gained an advantage, in consequence of backsliding and sin on the part of Israel, they failed not impiously to proclaim that their idols had gotten them the victory in spite of Jehovah, the only living and true God. Thus, when, for the punishment of the sin and presumption of Israel, the ark of the covenant was permitted to fall into the hands of the Philistines, they carried it in triumph to the house of their god, and set it by Dagon their idol, as a trophy of his victory over the God of Israel. So, in like manner, when Samson by his folly had permitted himself to be ensnared and taken captive by his enemies, "the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon

their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand." And we are told that when the Philistines found Saul and his three sons fallen in Mount Gilboa, they "sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people." If the heathen, then, were thus ready on every occasion of even a partial advantage over Israel, to boast themselves of their idols, and to profane the name of Jehovah, how much more might they be expected to glory in the fancied superiority of their gods, when they succeeded in making a complete conquest of the land of Israel and Judah, destroying and laying waste their cities, burning Jerusalem and the temple with fire, and carrying the king, the princes, the nobles, and the greater part of the people, into captivity!

More than a hundred years before Jerusalem was thus destroyed, the heathen, even of distant lands, had very unequivocally manifested the enmity and proud defiance with which they regarded the God of Israel; for in the time of Hezekiah, when the "king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them," and proceeded to besiege Jerusalem itself, we are told that the captain of his host thus blasphemed the name and defied the power of Jehovah, "Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The Lord will deliver us. . . . . Who are they among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"

On that occasion God was pleased to interpose for the vindication of his own supremacy, and for the deliverance of Judah and Jerusalem, by punishing "the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks;" for "the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand;" and the king of Assyria himself was soon after slain by his own sons, while worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, in Nineveh. But when, at length, not only Israel, or the ten tribes, which had already been carried into captivity at the time now referred to, but Judah also and Jerusalem, were conquered and laid waste, the heathen had very plausible grounds for alleging that they had at last proved what from the beginning they had asserted,

and wished to prove,—namely, that their false gods were superior to Jehovah, the God of Israel,—inasmuch as they had, in spite of him, conquered and carried captive the people for whom, as the heathen themselves could not deny, he had wrought many wonderful deliverances, and whom he had pledged his power and faithfulness to defend. We might expect, therefore, that the heathen, who destroyed Jerusalem, and carried Judah captive, would boast of their triumph,—not only as a victorious nation has been wont to glory over a vanquished one, but as having reduced, as they thought, to the level of their own abominable idols,—or rather below it,—the God of Israel, of whose holiness and purity of worship, as well as power, they knew enough to render him the object of their dislike as well as their dread. And so, accordingly, we find they did; for it is said, in the verse immediately preceding the passage before us, "When they entered into the heathen, whither they went,"—that is, when Israel, and especially Judah, were carried into a heathen land,—"they," namely, Israel and Judah, "profaned my holy name," or subjected my holy name to reproach, "when they," the heathen, "said to them, These are the people of Jehovah, and are gone forth out of his land."

This was a very bitter taunt. It implied that the God of Israel, of whose supremacy they had heard so much, was either unable to protect his people in the land which he had promised to their fathers, or was not faithful enough to fulfil his promise. And with what humiliation and self-reproach must the truly penitent and devout among the captives have heard this impious but plausible taunt, conscious as they were that their own backsliding, as well as the more grievous backsliding of their guiltier brethren, was the cause of that calamity which had necessarily come upon them, and which had given "occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme!" From the beginning, even by the mouth of Moses, they had been threatened with famine, with pestilence, with the sword, and last of all with captivity, if they should forget and forsake the Lord God of their fathers; and, therefore, when they continued obstinately to do so, the holiness, and rectitude, and faithfulness, and truth of God were pledged, and necessarily required that these judgments should be executed. But then the infliction of them furnished a plausible ground to

the heathen to speak reproachfully of Jehovah,—to charge him either with weakness or want of truth, or with both. This must have unspeakably aggravated to the true people of God the bitterness of all the other calamities which had befallen them. Every thing else they might be brought to bear with some degree of patience and composure, conscious as they were that they suffered less than their iniquities deserved. But the reproach of the heathen continually saying unto them, "Where is thy God?" must have been a perpetual source of fresh sorrow and self-reproach to them, reminding them that they had brought dishonour on the name of the Lord which they could not remove, and furnished ground to the heathen to profane that name too plausible for them to refute. The sin of Israel and Judah is thus brought before us in a light which must make it palpable to all. But are not God's professing people still but too frequently chargeable with the same sin,—the sin of furnishing occasion by their inconsistencies for ungodly men to triumph? Such inconsistencies will not pass unheeded; nor will they fail to strengthen unbelievers in their fatal delusion, by affording them ground not only to allege, but to think that they who profess to believe the Gospel are no better than themselves. It may, no doubt, be bitter enough for professing Christians thus to have subjected themselves to the censure of the world; but how much more bitter should it be to them to reflect that they may, by their conformity to the world, have inflicted an injury which they cannot repair,—that of encouraging others to continue in a course of sin and folly,—and also may have brought discredit on the cause of Christ, by giving "occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully!"

Such was the sad condition to which the captives of Judah and Jerusalem had brought themselves. They were driven into a state of exile which, for any thing they could do, was hopeless; and if they could not deliver themselves, as little could they counteract the evil that they had done, in causing the name of the Lord to be profaned among the heathen. They could only weep when they that carried them captive required of them mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." But God was still the Holy One of Israel, able both to deliver his people, and to vindicate his own supremacy in the sight of the

heathen. And, moreover, he had pledged his faithfulness to do so. He had, unconditionally, by a sovereign act of grace, declared to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed; and for the fulfilment of this promise, he had given the patriarch another, namely, that his seed should possess the land of Canaan for an everlasting inheritance, and should enjoy his special protection against all attempts utterly to destroy or irrecoverably to disperse them. This, of course, implied that until He came in whom the first and great promise was to be fulfilled, that of blessing all nations, there should never cease to be a Church in the family of Abraham,—some, at least, though at times but a remnant, according to the election of grace, who should be kept from altogether forsaking the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and who, by faith in the promised Saviour, should be partakers in all the blessings secured by covenant to Abraham. Even they might be chargeable with much sin and backsliding, and God might see meet to "visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes;" but he could not utterly and for ever cast them off, as the heathen obviously supposed that he had done. As his holiness required that he should execute upon them, and upon their still guiltier brethren, the judgment which he had long threatened; so the same holiness required that he should again interpose for their deliverance, and for their restoration to the land and to the privileges which they had forfeited, and for a season lost. They, indeed, did not deserve this; and so they were expressly told: "Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went." And the declaration is repeated in still more solemn terms: "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel."

The ground, then, on which God interposed, or promised to interpose, on behalf of his captive people, was the covenant of grace,—that covenant which is well ordered in all things and sure,—the covenant which has often prevented the fierce anger of the Lord from breaking forth and consuming the whole world of sinful men, and in virtue of which it is that we are in

the land of the living and in the place of hope. In his sovereign grace and mercy he entered into this covenant with the Mediator, in the perfect foreknowledge of all the folly and provocation which he was to endure at the hand of the children of men, even of those who by that covenant were given to the Mediator as his own, as his reward for satisfying on their behalf the demands of law and justice. And therefore it was that notwithstanding all the backsliding of the true Church herself, as well as the abounding iniquity of the world at large, and notwithstanding the many sore judgments which it was necessary to inflict, still there was mercy in reserve for God's own people, and, on their account, forbearance towards others who were not of his true Church. And it was on this ground, namely, that he was the faithful and covenant-keeping God, that he promised to interpose for and deliver his people, as recorded in the passage before us. But while a regard to his own holiness, and justice, and truth, was of itself a sufficient, and indeed the true ground of his interposition on behalf of the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, there was another purpose to be accomplished by that interposition, namely, the vindication of his supremacy in the sight of the heathen, by whom his people had been carried captive. In the victory which they had gained over Israel, and especially over Judah and Jerusalem, they boasted in their idols as at least equal, if not superior to Jehovah the God of Israel; and he was pleased, therefore, to say that he would refute and confound this vain boasting whereby they had profaned his holy name. This, moreover, is spoken of as the immediate and chief object for which he was to interpose for the deliverance of his people: "I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am Jehovah, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes."

And if the proof or demonstration of his supremacy, as the only living and true God, was the only or main object that was to be accomplished, then nothing more was required but to deliver his people from captivity, and, in spite of all opposition, to carry them back in safety to the land of their fathers. A mere act of almighty power was sufficient to accomplish this. He had done as wonderful a thing before, when he brought his people

out of Egypt, conducted them through the Red Sea, where he overwhelmed their enemies, fed and guided them in the wilderness, cast out the heathen before them, and planted them in the mountain which his own right hand had purchased. He could have done so again. He could have raised up another Moses qualified and commissioned to work the same wonders in Babylon that had formerly been wrought in the land of Egypt, and have made the return of his people to Canaan as triumphant as was Joshua's first entrance into that land, when the walls of Jericho fell down on the blowing of the rams' horns and the shouting of the people. It did not seem meet to his infinite wisdom thus to work out deliverance for his captive people. But he adopted a method which did not less clearly demonstrate his absolute supremacy, while, at the same time, it furnished a very striking display of the holy, wise, and powerful control which he exercises over all his creatures and over all their actions. Throughout the whole period of Judah's captivity, he did from time to time so demonstrate his sovereignty on their behalf as to extort from the proudest and most powerful of their oppressors an acknowledgment of that sovereignty. Even the haughty Nebuchadnezzar himself was constrained to say at different times, "Of a truth it is, that your God"—the God of Daniel—"is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings;"—"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; .... there is no other god that can deliver after this sort;"—"Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, and extol, and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

Belshazzar, a successor of Nebuchadnezzar, and still more profligate than he, was arrested in the very act of profaning the holy vessels which had been brought from the temple at Jerusalem. A hand-writing from God appeared upon the wall, which God's own prophet alone was able to read and interpret; and the king was constrained to do honour to the man who pronounced upon him the sentence of his own immediate and irretrievable ruin, and the utter overthrow of his kingdom. When Darius, the conqueror of Belshazzar, found, to his great relief and joy, that Daniel was preserved in the den of lions, into which the king had, by fraud and flattery, been persuaded to cast him, "he wrote unto all people, nations, and languages," which

formed his mighty empire, saying, "I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end." And, finally, when the seventy years of the captivity foretold by Jeremiah came to an end, "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem." When we reflect, then, how many heathen kings, —kings of the mightiest monarchy on the earth,—were thus successively constrained to proclaim their reverential dread of the Lord God of Israel, and when we think of the extent to which this testimony was published among all kindreds, and nations, and tongues, we must perceive that the name of Jehovah was proclaimed as it had never been before. How gloriously, then, was the promise fulfilled, "I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land!"

But here a very momentous question presents itself regarding the captives themselves, and one which could hardly fail to occur at least to the humble and devout among them. It was of course very plain, that if the deliverance here promised should be carried into effect, as we have seen it was, it would assuredly vindicate the sovereignty and glorify the name of the Lord in the sight of the heathen. But when the promise was made, and the fulfilment of it still distant, might they not have had reason to ask how it was possible that such a deliverance could ever be wrought out for them, consistently with the holiness and rectitude of God? It was the holiness and rectitude of God that rendered it necessary that Judah should be carried

into captivity; and on what principle, therefore, consistently with these attributes of the divine character, could they be delivered from that captivity, and restored again to the land from which, after great forbearance and long-suffering, they had been cast out because they could no longer be endured? They had nothing, and never could have any thing of their own that could be a reason why God should reverse his procedure towards them, and act in a manner directly the opposite to that in which he had before acted. And they are carefully reminded that they were utterly unworthy of the promised deliverance, and never could be otherwise: "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel." If, then, they were unfit to be preserved in the land sworn to their fathers because of their backsliding and sin, they were equally unfit to be again restored to it, and so to be openly recognised and acknowledged as God's people. No doubt it was a very important object that the sovereignty of Jehovah should be vindicated in the sight of the heathen by the deliverance of his people, whom they boasted of having conquered and carried into captivity. But this was not to be done in a way inconsistent with the divine holiness and rectitude; for this would not have been to sanctify his great name. It was thus that the humble and lowly among the captives might be expected to reason, when the promise of deliverance and restoration was first announced to them; and if no farther explanation had been given to them, they might have been ready to doubt whether they could ever be delivered at all. But all their difficulties were anticipated, and all their doubts resolved, by the gracious promise, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

They were thus assured that their deliverance and their restoration should be in perfect consistency with the holiness and

rectitude of God,—nay, that by their sanctification he was in a special manner to sanctify or glorify his own great name. Their being made holy did not, indeed, render them worthy of his interposition on their behalf. But it was befitting his character, and necessary for the manifestation of his rectitude as the Holy One of Israel, that those whom he openly acknowledged as his people should be holy. It was not his mere sovereignty alone that required to be asserted and vindicated. It was his sovereignty as the God of holiness, and purity, and truth that was to be demonstrated; and this he could not do by merely delivering the captives of Judah, unless at the same time he made them holy. He had cast them out of their land because they had forgotten and forsaken him; and in doing so he had borne a solemn testimony to his own holiness. But he could not, consistently with this, bring them back again in the same state in which they were carried away. And to the humble, devout, and broken in heart among them, this must have appeared the great, the insurmountable difficulty in the way of their being restored at all, conscious as they were, that neither for themselves nor for their guiltier brethren could they do any thing to render it a befitting thing for God to interpose on their behalf. But God promised that he would do it for them,—that he would not only forgive their iniquities, but cleanse them from their filthiness and their idols,—and that he would demonstrate not merely his almighty power and sovereignty in delivering them, but his holiness also, by showing that those for whom he interposed, and whom he openly acknowledged as his people, were a holy people. And there was nothing in all this to awaken pride in the heart of the restored captives, but, on the contrary, every thing to humble them, inasmuch as their outward deliverance was not more an act of sovereign power than their inward renewal in the spirit of their mind was a work of sovereign grace. And it was, accordingly, predicted that such would actually be the effect upon them; for it is said in the following context, "Then,"—that is, after God had done for them all that he had promised,—"then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations." While, therefore, God promised to visit Israel and Judah in their captivity, and

to restore them to the land of their fathers, he promised also,—what was to them of unspeakably greater importance,—that he would give them a heart to know and love him. And when he declared that he would be sanctified in them, he had respect especially to the fulfilment of the promise which followed that declaration, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them; ..... and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

It appears, then, that the true Israel of old, God's own people, the spiritual children of Abraham, and heirs of the promise made to him, were distinguished from the world, not only by the enjoyment of certain outward privileges, whereby they were set forth as the objects of God's special care and protection, but by being made the subjects of the quickening, life-giving, and purifying power of the Spirit of God. The necessity as well as the nature of regeneration and sanctification by the Holy Ghost, is here taught, not only in the clearest, but in the most emphatic manner; and not here only, but in various other passages of this book, and of other books of the Old Testament, where the doctrine is set forth in almost the very words here employed. When our Lord, therefore, during his manifestation in the flesh, announced the same doctrine to Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler, and certainly one of the best of them, and when Nicodemus declared that he did not understand what Jesus meant, well might he say in reply, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"—the things which have been so plainly taught in the very Scriptures which thou professest to teach and to expound. But in the converse which our Lord held with Nicodemus, he has told us, in a very solemn and impressive manner, that what constituted the real difference between God's true people and the heathen, or the mere nominal Israel, is the same that still distinguishes true believers from mere nominal Christians, or from a world lying in sin,—namely, the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Spirit on the heart: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And, in a certain sense, this is especially true of believers under the Gospel dispensation. And so it was foretold in the Old Testament, for, in the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, the new covenant or Gospel dispensation

is described as especially consisting in the fulfilment to God's people of the very promise here recorded: "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Everywhere, indeed, both in the Old and New Testament, the Gospel dispensation is characterised as a dispensation under which the Church was to receive a more abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit. It was by this promise of the Spirit, to be in them, and to abide with them for ever, that our Lord sought in a special manner to comfort the hearts of his sorrowing disciples in the prospect of his leaving them: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you," "even the Spirit of truth;"—he will "abide with you for ever," and "he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." And this promise was not limited to the first disciples. The apostle declares of believers generally that they are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." "Know ye not," says he to the Corinthians, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" And again, with express reference to the promise contained in the passage before us, and elsewhere in the Old Testament, as being especially fulfilled in the Christian Church, he says, "Ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." This, indeed, is the consideration which the apostle especially urges upon believers as a motive for their separating themselves from an ungodly world, and walking worthy of their high and holy vocation. "Wherefore," says he, "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

And surely the motive ought to be a very powerful and influential one; for how is the great name of Jehovah to be sanctified in his people in the sight of the world, if it is not by the holiness of their life and character? God's people are not now separated outwardly from the rest of the world, as they formerly

were. Under the old dispensation they dwelt apart from the other nations,—hedged in and guarded by the special providence of God,—and enjoying tokens of his favour which were palpable to all; and often did he glorify his great name by interposing to protect them in the possession of their inheritance. And Israel, it is to be feared, did but too frequently presume on their being thus preserved, notwithstanding their backsliding, because, as they fancied, God would not permit his power and sovereignty to be brought into doubt in the sight of the heathen. But the separation of the Church from the world now is altogether spiritual, the effect of the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit, promised and described in the verses we have been considering; and it is by the manifestation of this effect in the holy life of believers that God is sanctified in them before the eyes of the world. Do we, then, belong to the Church? Have we been separated from the world by this operation of the Spirit, working in us the work of faith with power? Is there any thing in us or about us that can reasonably warrant us to conclude that we have been born again,—that a new heart and a new spirit have been put within us? The question is of eternal moment to us; let us not trifle with it. And if we have good ground to believe that it may be answered in the affirmative, then another, and also a momentous question, presents itself. Are we feelingly alive to the responsibility which lies upon us to see that God's great name is sanctified in us? Do we feel, as his professing people, that if we do not, by our life and character, glorify his name, we must profane it? And are we careful to bear in mind the solemn trust thus committed to us? It is, indeed, a solemn and weighty trust; but grace is promised in abundance to enable us to be faithful to it. And if we are jealous for his honour,—if it be our great concern to glorify him,—and if we earnestly inquire, as he says that he must be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do for them even what he has promised, then not only shall we be preserved from profaning his name, but grace will be given us to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things," by a life and conversation becoming the Gospel, and to "show forth the praises of Him who who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light."

LVI.

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES.

EZEKIEL XXXVII. 1-28.

THIS chapter is a continuation of the message which the prophet was commissioned to deliver to his brethren in captivity, as contained in the three immediately preceding chapters. Both they and the prophet had already been twelve or thirteen years in captivity. During that period, however, Jerusalem was still standing, and Judah was still a kingdom under the government of Zedekiah, who, by the permission of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, reigned over the residue of the people who had not been carried away in the first captivity. So long as Jerusalem and the temple thus stood, the captives who had already been carried to Babylon still cherished the hope that they might soon be restored, notwithstanding that Jeremiah had, at an early period of their captivity, written to them to warn them against the false prophets who flattered them with the promise of a speedy return, and to assure them that they were to be exiles in Babylon for seventy years. But this false hope must have been utterly extinguished, when intelligence was brought to Ezekiel, as in the 33d chapter we are informed it was, that Jerusalem was smitten. We are not directly and expressly told what the effect of this intelligence was on the prophet's captive brethren. But he has told us indirectly and very emphatically; for no sooner did that intelligence reach him than he was commissioned to address them in language full of consolation and encourage-

ment, thereby plainly intimating that they were in danger of sinking into a state of depression and hopelessness. In the 34th chapter he assures them, that though they were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd, wandering through all the mountains and upon every high hill, yea, scattered upon all the face of the earth, none searching or seeking them out, yet they would, nevertheless, be gathered, inasmuch as Jehovah himself would seek them out, and deliver them out of all the places where they had been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And this general promise of deliverance is followed up by one of the clearest and most explicit predictions of Christ to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures: "I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David: he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them: I the Lord have spoken it."

The prophet then goes on, in the 35th chapter, to tell his captive brethren what sore judgments were coming upon Edom for their sake, because in the day of their calamity Edom had manifested a bitter hatred against them, rejoicing in their adversity, and triumphing in their dispersion, as if they had been cast out of their inheritance for ever: "As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, O Mount Seir, and all Idumea, even all of it; and they shall know that I am the Lord." This was, or ought to have been, to the captives, a very affecting proof of God's pity and compassion for them, inasmuch as it was a declaration that he regarded their enemies as his enemies, and would assuredly visit these enemies with righteous retribution. And in the 36th chapter, the prophet proceeds to remove another ground of fear, which his captive brethren might naturally enough entertain, that their restoration was hopeless. It was for their sin that they were cast out of their own land; and having thus forfeited and lost their inheritance, they could do nothing to recover it. And even if they were graciously forgiven, was it consistent with the holiness and rectitude of God openly to acknowledge as his people those whom he had openly disowned and cast out of his presence? This was an obstacle to their deliverance and restoration which, to the humble, penitent, and

broken-hearted among them, must have appeared insurmountable. But the prophet assures them that this obstacle also would be removed,—that God would not only vindicate his name and his memorial as the Lord God merciful and gracious, forgiving their iniquity, and transgression, and sin; but would also sanctify his great name as the Holy One of Israel by their sanctification,—by sending forth his Spirit so to quicken, and transform, and purify them, that they might be fit for again enjoying his favour and fellowship, and fit also for being again acknowledged and dealt with as his people in the sight of the heathen: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

It might be supposed, then, that, with such exceeding great and precious promises, the truly humble and penitent among the captives,—those who constituted the Church,—could need nothing more to dispel their fears, and fill them with comfort and good hope. It appears, however, from the manner in which the prophet addresses them in the chapter before us, that they were still prone to distrust and despondency,—still disposed to regard their condition as hopeless. Every thing, indeed, in their outward condition was fitted greatly to depress and discourage them; for they were but an handful of feeble and depressed prisoners, held in bondage by the mightiest monarch then in the world. I say, they were but an handful; for though all their princes, and their mighty men of valour, and their craftsmen, had been carried away, so that there remained none save the poorest sort of the people of the land, yet so wasted had they been through their backsliding, before the last and severest judgment came upon them, that the captives amounted only to ten thousand. And what a contrast did this present to the earlier and better period of their history, when Judah alone could furnish hundreds of thousands of men ready for war!

But it was not only their wasted and helpless condition outwardly that was fitted to keep alive a feeling of hopelessness in regard to their restoration to the land of their fathers. It appears that they were greatly depressed, also, on account of the spiritual condition both of themselves and of their brethren in captivity. Being themselves humbled under the mighty hand of God, they would call to remembrance their own backsliding and sin; and would reflect how little they had done to bear testimony for God,—how indifferent they had often been to what concerned his glory,—and into what a low state they had sunk, generally, in regard to spiritual and divine things. And when, with a deep sense of their own declension, they considered the character of but too many of their fellow-captives, who were still unhumbled, either cherishing the hopes which false prophets had awakened respecting a speedy restoration, or surrendering themselves to a rebellious feeling of impatience and fretfulness, they might be ready to conclude that the prospect of their being spiritually quickened was utterly hopeless, and, therefore, their deliverance from captivity equally so.

No doubt, the promises already addressed to them, and the assurances therein given, both of outward enlargement and inward quickening, ought to have dispelled their fears, and convinced them that God would, without fail, do for them all that he had said. And so ought the first announcement of the Gospel to pacify the conscience of every convicted and contrite soul; for the promise of God, once given, ought to be felt to be as sure and as worthy of confidence as when it is ten times repeated. But true believers,—and, especially, they who have been very deeply exercised on the subject of their state Godward,—will be the least disposed to wonder that the homeless and heart-broken captives in Babylon should desire something more still than even the precious promises of the preceding chapters, to remove their doubts and misgivings, and to give them the comforting assurance that God had not cast them off for ever. And God was pleased to renew his promise to them, in a manner still more emphatic than before,—assuring them that however desperate they might think their condition to be, it was not beyond his power to help and deliver them. He sent his servant the prophet to relate to them a vision which he had seen,

and in which the Spirit of the Lord had carried him out, and set him down "in the midst of the valley which was full of bones." These bones, as seen by the prophet, "were very many;" "and, lo, they were very dry." The question was then put to the prophet, "Can these bones live?" The prophet's answer, as it appears to me, was a very becoming one,—implying, on the one hand, that he could not conceive how these bones could live, but acknowledging, on the other hand, that nothing was beyond the reach of Jehovah's power. The prophet answered, "O Lord God, thou knowest." There was in this answer true humility and true faith; and they were met, on the part of God, as unfeigned humility and faith will always be met, even by a new and still brighter manifestation of the divine grace and condescension. The prophet was commanded to prophesy upon the bones,—that is, to declare the divine mind and will concerning them, or to give utterance to the command of God to them: "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord: .... Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live; and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live." And while the prophet thus continued to prophesy, or to declare, as he was commanded, the will of God concerning them, he beheld, and, lo, the mighty power of God went forth to re-unite these dry and scattered bones, to cover them with sinews and with flesh, and, finally, to breathe into them the breath of life, so that "they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

This vision, considered simply in itself, and without any application to a special case, must have greatly encouraged and strengthened the prophet, as giving him the assurance, that whatever he was commissioned to foretell or to promise to his captive brethren would assuredly be fulfilled, however unlikely, or even incredible, it might appear. And we can easily conceive that the prophets did sometimes stand in need of having their own faith sustained and confirmed in what they themselves were commissioned to predict, inasmuch as they often foretold what, to human sagacity and foresight, would appear altogether impossible. But, in the present case, the prophet was told that the

vision which had been vouchsafed to him was expressly designed for the consolation and encouragement of the captive people of the Lord, and that for this purpose it was to be communicated to them, assuring them, that though their revival and restoration might appear as the quickening to life of dry and scattered bones, yet that revival and that restoration should certainly take place: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live: and I shall place you in your own land."

It is plain, I think, that this application of the vision to the prophet's captive brethren, was not only meant to assure them that though their condition was very hopeless, they should nevertheless be delivered, but that it was designed to describe what that condition actually was,—especially their spiritual condition. Outwardly, as feeble, scattered, and dispirited exiles, they were as helpless, in regard to their own deliverance, as men in their graves, and spiritually they were dead. It is not meant, of course, that there was no spiritual life in any of them; for there is evidence enough that there was a remnant of God's true people among them,—individuals, not a few, it is to be hoped, who, though in the midst of abounding iniquity their love might have waxed cold, still constituted the better portion of the Church, as compared with those whom they had left behind them in Judah and Jerusalem. But there is abundant evidence, also, that the captives, as a body, were in a state of great spiritual deadness, and that what they especially needed was the quickening and life-giving power of the Spirit of God. And the vision which was vouchsafed to the prophet not only assured them that they should experience this power, but it set forth, in a very intelligible and interesting manner, in what way, and by what instrumentality, the power of the Spirit was to be exercised and to take effect upon them. It was by prophesying,—that is, declaring the mind and will of God concerning them,—that the

dry and scattered bones began to move, and re-unite, and be covered with sinews, and flesh, and skin, and to breathe, and live, and stand up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. And so in regard to the spiritually dead of the house of Israel and Judah, it was by prophesying, or declaring the mind and will of God concerning them, that they were to be quickened to spiritual life. And this the prophet did when he delivered God's gracious message, as contained in this and the preceding chapters. He solemnly reminded them, in language which God himself put into his mouth, of their disobedience and rebellion, whereby they had rendered it necessary that he should cast them out of their own land, and scatter them among the heathen, and had thus been the guilty cause of his holy name being profaned. But having thus set their sin before them, he was commissioned to proclaim to them the grace and mercy of God,—his purpose of interposing on their behalf, not only to deliver them from bodily captivity, but to redeem them from spiritual bondage, —and his gracious promise to plant them again in their own land, and ultimately to unite Israel and Judah as a flock under one shepherd, even his servant David, who should be king over them, and under whose government they should walk in the judgments of the Lord, and observe his statutes, and do them.

This was the substance of Ezekiel's prophesying,—the declaration which he was commissioned to make of God's gracious mind and will regarding them. And it was by the Spirit's opening their eyes to see and their hearts to receive what the prophet thus declared that they were to be quickened to spiritual life. The word which was put into the prophet's mouth was not a mere prediction of what God was to work in and on behalf of his people. That very word was itself the instrument by which the work was to be done. Their spiritual quickening began at the moment they began to believe what the prophet declared to them, and to believe it as the word of Jehovah. The first effect of their so believing would be to lay them low in the dust by the thought that they had not only themselves insulted the majesty and rebelled against the authority of the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, but had given occasion and great encouragement to the heathen to profane his holy name. This conviction would produce, at

least, a fearful apprehension of God's righteous displeasure, and deep self-condemnation for having, in the madness of their folly, dared to defy the power of the only living and true God. So far their feeling might be that of mere remorse, awakened by a dread of divine wrath. But when they saw, and were brought to believe, that God had long borne with their folly and provocation, because he was unwilling to give them up,—and that they had taken encouragement, from his very forbearance and long-suffering patience, to continue in their course of perverse rebellion against him,—then their remorse, or self-condemnation, would begin to partake of the character of what the Scriptures call godly sorrow,—that is, sorrow for sin,—not merely because it subjected them to the righteous retribution of God, as the just God and the Lawgiver, but as committed against divine forbearance and compassion. And farther, when, in addition to all this, they came to believe, and to be fully persuaded, that even after all their provocation and folly, God's thoughts towards them were thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give them an expected or longed-for end of all their calamities, they would be melted into unfeigned contrition and true godly sorrow. They would not only admit and acknowledge that they had been righteously dealt with, in so far as they had been made to suffer, but that they might righteously have been treated with still greater severity,—that it was of the Lord's mercies that they had not been utterly consumed. It is plain that they could not, in their heart and conscience, truly believe all that the prophet declared to them, without being brought into such a state of mind and feeling as I have now described. And being brought into this state, being persuaded that God was pacified towards them for all that they had done, their own personal interests would become a secondary thing, in their estimation, compared with the manifestation of the divine glory,—the glory of Him who had already done, and had promised yet to do such good things on their behalf. They would, therefore, look forward with earnest and longing expectation, as their father Abraham did, to the day which they were never to see, but in the anticipation of which they could nevertheless rejoice, when God was especially to glorify himself by blessing and exalting his Church, in sending his servant David, the long-promised Messiah, to be her shepherd and her king, ruling over

her and in her, defending her from danger, and restraining and conquering all his and her enemies.

That day, as I have already remarked, they were not to see, inasmuch as nearly six hundred years had still to elapse before Christ appeared. But his appearing was the ground of their restoration to the divine favour, and their security, moreover, for their continuing to enjoy that favour. Had it not been for the covenant in which he engaged to redeem a Church, and by which a Church was given and secured to him, they had been utterly and for ever cast off. In being restored to God's favour, and acknowledged and dealt with as his people, they formed a link in that chain which united the first promise of a Saviour in paradise with the accomplishment of his work on Calvary. They could rejoice, therefore, in the day here foretold by the prophet, though they were not actually to see it,—the day when David, Jehovah's servant, was to appear as the shepherd and king of Israel, to watch and rule over them for ever,—and when the sanctuary of the Lord should be in the midst of them for evermore. The restoration of the captives in Babylon formed a step towards the accomplishment of this great and glorious plan; and if they believed this, so far as they could understand and conceive of it, they must in so believing have undergone the great change set forth in the figurative language of the passage: "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel." They could not really believe all the good things which the prophet spoke concerning them, and concerning the Church in future times, without being filled with godly sorrow for their former disobedience and forgetfulness of God,—with admiration and gratitude at the thought of all the forbearance and mercy which they had experienced,—with still more profound admiration of the grace and goodness of which they were made partakers, in being received again into favour with God,—and with hope and joy in the prospect of the glorious things that were foretold to them of Messiah's advent. And if they believed all these things at the moment that they were announced to them,—if Ezekiel's prophesying was accompanied by the power of the Spirit, carrying his word to the understanding and the heart of his captive brethren,—then he would have the satisfaction of

seeing realised in them what had been represented to him in vision regarding the dry bones,—even the dead quickened to life, and standing up upon their feet an exceeding great army.

The description thus given of the means or instrumentality by which the spiritually dead among the Jewish captives of old were quickened to spiritual life, is equally applicable to the conversion and regeneration of sinners in Gospel times. It seems, indeed, to be plainly intimated that the promises in this and the preceding chapter were to be fully accomplished only in Gospel times, or in the day when David, the servant of Jehovah, should appear to gather in and watch over his flock. And he accomplishes this his gracious work in the same way and by the same means as he did of old,—even by prophesying, or declaring to sinners the mind and will of God. Till he came, that will was but partially revealed; for it was in the finished work of Christ alone that the grace and love of God could be fully manifested. But that work being finished, the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God being clearly made known, Christ having been delivered unto the death for his people's offences, and raised again for their justification, there was committed to the apostles, as there had been to the prophet of old, a message of mercy, to be by them proclaimed not to Jews only, but also to Gentiles,—even "the word of reconciliation," "to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." This precious truth they were commissioned to declare; and with the commission they received an assurance that the Holy Spirit would accompany their word with his quickening and life-giving power, so that by the faith of that word men should be brought out of darkness and bondage into the light and liberty of the sons of God. This commission the apostles executed with great fidelity and zeal, aiming at nothing less than going into all the world, and preaching the Gospel to every creature; and in executing their commission, they found the promise which accompanied it to be faithful and true. Wherever they came, they found men in a state of spiritual death, even as the dry bones which the prophet saw in vision; and it might have appeared an utterly hopeless thing that they should ever live. But the apostles were commanded to prophesy upon these dry bones. They did so, resting on the faithfulness of Him

who had said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;" and while they prophesied, there was a noise and a shaking among the dry bones,—"and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

And so the great work of conversion, the revival of those who were spiritually dead, continues to be carried on. Men in their unregenerate state are still in spiritual death,—still as dry bones; and it is still by prophesying that they are quickened to spiritual life, and kept spiritually alive. Prophesying, indeed, there can be none now, in the sense of revealing new truth. But the declaration of the mind and will of God for the salvation of sinners, though repeated ten thousand times, is still prophesying; and when accompanied by the power of the Spirit, giving testimony to it as the word of his grace, it will prove as efficacious now as it ever was, for quickening those who are dead in trespasses and in sins. Wherever, therefore, the Gospel has been faithfully proclaimed in the hearing of unregenerate men, there has been prophesying upon the dry bones; and the momentous question with all should be, Has this prophesying been accompanied to them with a quickening and life-giving power? We have already seen, in the case of the Jewish captives of old, what are some, at least, of the symptoms of spiritual life which begin to appear when the Word becomes quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword in the heart and conscience of men; and the consideration of these may help us to discover whether the Word has proved to us the word of eternal life. The Gospel, if really believed, will be accompanied or followed by the same effects upon sinners now, that the prophesying of Ezekiel was on the humble and penitent captives of Judah. It will awaken the same godly sorrow and contrition for sin,—the same gratitude for the divine forbearance and mercy,—the same admiration of the grace and love of God in receiving them again into favour, —and the same affectionate concern for the advancement of his glory. How lamentable, then, to think, what I fear is but too true, that men should give themselves to the reading or hearing of the Gospel, without any serious inquiry whether it has been already accompanied to them with a quickening power, and without any earnest desire that it should now or hereafter be so!

The passage before us presents a very solemn consideration to all such. It tells them that the Word, which they read and hear with so much formality and indifference, is designed to be the channel whereby the Spirit of God conveys light and life to the soul. And is it not, then, a presumptuous trifling with all that is most solemn and sacred, to continue from time to time reading and hearing that Word, without any serious inquiry whether it has been to them what it is graciously designed to be? They may feel, perhaps, that it is a duty so to read and hear the Word, that they would not be quite at ease if they neglected to do so,—and that, having done it, they enjoy the satisfaction of having discharged a duty; or they may even experience in perusing or hearing the Word some gratification of their taste, or some pleasure in the intellectual exercise which it affords them. But all this makes no approach to the momentous effects here ascribed to prophesying, and ascribed in the New Testament to the Gospel, when it comes, not "in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." When it does so come, the effect is nothing less than a new creation,—a being born again,—a resurrection from death unto life. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away, behold all things are become new." And how, then, can any man who professes to believe the Gospel rest contented from day to day without having ascertained,—nay, without having seriously endeavoured to ascertain,—whether he has thus passed from death unto life? But are believers themselves always careful and anxious about their growth in grace, and their advancement in the divine life? It appears that even the people of God among the captives, to whom Ezekiel prophesied, had become very dry, and greatly needed the quickening power of the Spirit. So it may be with the people of God still. They may fail to find, because they do not earnestly seek in the Word, that spiritual refreshment which it was wont to yield. They may have become less frequent and less urgent in prayer, for the continued and more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit on themselves and on the Church. And what, then, can they expect but that his gracious influence will be withheld? This passage does most emphatically teach the necessity of the Spirit's presence in the Word, if that Word is to be quickening; and, therefore, the

necessity of prayer on the part of the Church for his gracious presence. And the people of God have large encouragement so to pray; for the Scriptures warrant and teach them to expect that, in answer to prayer, the Word of God will have free course, and be glorified; that where it is faithfully proclaimed, it will be accompanied with the demonstration of the Spirit and with power; and that the prophet's vision will continue to be realised, and still more largely,—even breath entering into the dry bones, so that they live, and stand up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

LVII.

DANIEL'S PRAYER, AND THE ANSWER.

DANIEL IX. 24–27.

THE prophet Daniel, along with certain others of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes, was carried as a captive to Babylon, in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, about eight years before the great captivity, in which the prophet Ezekiel was carried away, and nearly twenty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. Though it does not appear that any large portion of the people were carried captive with Daniel, yet that event formed a memorable period in the history of Judah. From that period is dated the commencement of the seventy years' captivity foretold by the prophet Jeremiah; and, moreover, in the captivity of Daniel and his companions was fulfilled the threatening addressed to Hezekiah, the king of Judah, by Isaiah the prophet, an hundred years before: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house .... shall be carried to Babylon; .... and of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Daniel, then, was carried away with the first of the Jewish captives, and continued to reside in Babylon during the whole period of the seventy years' captivity. How long he lived after the restoration we are not informed, though there can be no doubt that he died in the land of Babylon; for had he returned to Jerusalem, such an event could hardly fail to have been recorded. But though

he was never again to see the land of his fathers, nor engage any more in the services of the sanctuary, which he must have estimated and enjoyed as few of his countrymen at that time did, yet he never ceased to cherish a deep and affectionate concern for the restoration of Jerusalem, "the city of the great King," the place which God had chosen to put his name there. Nor was this with him the feeling of a lonely, oppressed, and unpitied captive, enduring all the hardships and privations of slavery and exile, and dwelling in sad and hopeless longing on his country and his home. This was not the condition to which Daniel was reduced in the land of his captivity. He endured no such hardships. He was exposed, indeed, to the envy and hatred of the greatest and most influential men in Babylon, but it was because he occupied a still higher and more honourable place than they did. And when they succeeded, by fraud and flattery, in persuading the king to cast Daniel into the den of lions, it was because he dared to defy the impious mandate of the deluded Darius, who was persuaded to issue a decree, that whosoever should ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of the king himself, he should be cast into the den of lions. Daniel could not deny his God, and he could not live without prayer; and, therefore, though he occupied the highest place of any subject in the kingdom, he perilled all, and life itself, rather than cease to pray, or to alter his manner of prayer, whereby it appears he had till then borne testimony for God as the only living and true God, even amidst all the idolatries of Babylon. And in doing so, he did very strikingly declare what was the ground and nature of his affection for Jerusalem; for "when Daniel knew that the writing,"—that is, the king's decree,—"was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

By thus acting, he made it palpable to all who chose to watch him,—and there would be no want of spies upon him,—that he did dare to ask a petition of another than the king. He might have acted otherwise, and mere worldly wisdom would have dictated that he should do so. He might have prayed in secret, without any of his enemies being able to find it out; and if his

conscience had been as flexible as I fear conscience is often found to be, he might have continued to persuade himself that he was not denying his God, though he prudently avoided giving offence or incurring danger by an unnecessary display of his adherence to the worship of his God. But Daniel could not do so. It is plainly intimated that it had been his usual practice to pray in his chamber with the windows open toward Jerusalem; for it is said, on the occasion before us, that in doing so, it was as he did aforetime. His adversaries, too, must have known it; for on no other ground can we explain how they should have ensnared Daniel to his ruin than this, that they believed he would continue to do what they had often seen him do, and to expose himself to the charge of violating the king's decree. In these circumstances, Daniel could not change his former practice of praying with his windows open toward Jerusalem, and retire to pray in secret in his inner chamber, without denying his God in the sight of the heathen, and depriving himself of all freedom, and confidence, and boldness in approaching the throne of grace. His practice of opening his windows towards Jerusalem when he prayed was eminently an act of faith on his part,—faith in the promise given to Solomon at the dedication of the temple, with a special reference to Israelites in the circumstances in which Daniel then was,—that is, Israelites who should be carried away "captives unto a land far off or near." "If they bethink themselves," says Solomon, "in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity; .... if they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, ... and pray toward their land which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name: then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause." This was one, the last, I believe, of many petitions which Solomon presented before the Lord on the day that the temple was dedicated; and to it, as well as to all the others, a gracious answer was given, assuring Solomon that it was granted. On this assurance Daniel rested with confidence. Nor did he make any secret of what the ground of his confidence was, even to the idolatrous people among whom he sojourned, and

where he had risen to the highest and most honourable place which a subject could occupy,—being the first of the three presidents whom Darius had set over the hundred and twenty princes who were appointed to govern the kingdom. At the time to which I more immediately refer, Jerusalem and the temple had been for half a century in ruins. But God was still the faithful, the covenant-keeping, the prayer-hearing God; and Daniel, therefore, with the den of lions in view, "went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime," not fearing the king's commandment.

I have dwelt the longer on this particular incident in the history of Daniel, because it serves, I think, to show on what principle he had acted during the whole period of his more than seventy years' residence in the land of Babylon, and, especially, his unceasing regard for Jerusalem, and the ground of that regard. From the very beginning of his captivity, he threw himself on the faithfulness of God; and from the day on which he refused to take of the unclean meat appointed him by the king, to the last day of which any thing has been recorded of him, we find him adhering, with unshaken steadfastness, to his purpose of openly acknowledging the God of Israel as the only living and true God,—even threatening with God's righteous displeasure the very kings who had raised him from the condition of a poor friendless captive to that of their chief counsellor of state. No wonder that the envy and hatred of the courtiers and influential men of Babylon were awakened against him; for not only did they see a stranger and a captive exalted above them all, but in his open acknowledgment of Jehovah as the living God, and in the testimonies to the supremacy of his God which he extorted from their kings, they must have seen what they could not regard in any other light than as an insult to themselves personally, as well as to their gods. It is plain, moreover, that the strength of Daniel's confidence lay in God's gracious promises concerning Zion, whereby the prophet felt assured, that though Judah was wasted, and Jerusalem was laid in ashes, yet the Lord would one day visit and redeem his people, and plant them again in the land of their fathers. And this faith

on the part of Daniel was met with large communications of grace on the part of God. He was endued with wisdom, understanding, and will, which, independently of any miraculous interposition, would soon have marked him out to a wise and sagacious king as a person eminently qualified for the management of state affairs; and when, besides this, he was enabled, by immediate revelation, to make known, from time to time, to the monarchs whom he served, the meaning of certain divine intimations which greatly perplexed them, and the approach of certain events which did very deeply concern them, he was placed on an eminence as a counsellor, which none, even of the wisest of the wise men of Babylon, could approach. He was thus honoured, as few men had ever been, to testify for God even in the presence of the mightiest monarch of the world; and his testimony, moreover, was rendered subservient to his worldly exaltation, the enlargement of his worldly influence.

And with such influence as he possessed, what must he not have done, in the course of the seventy years' captivity, on behalf of his captive brethren? He was himself the first, as we have seen, who was carried away from the land of his fathers; and can we doubt that, like another Joseph, he was sent before them, if not actually "to preserve life," at least in various ways to mitigate the severities of their state of exile; and, what was infinitely more important, to keep alive the faith and the hope of God's true people in the promise of ultimate deliverance and restoration? Even at an early period of his residence in Babylon, at least before Jerusalem was destroyed, the fame of Daniel had so spread abroad, that we find him spoken of in the prophecies of Ezekiel in connection with Noah and Job, and placed, as it were, on the same level with them: "Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, ... and will cut off man and beast from it; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God." It is plain from this that the character of Daniel, as well as his condition, was well known to the captives to whom Ezekiel prophesied. And if so, the faith of those among them who were of God's true people must have been greatly strengthened by his example; while outwardly, it may

be, the hardships of their condition were in some degree mitigated through his influence with the successive kings to whom he was chief counsellor. We do not read of his thus interposing on their behalf; nor could we expect to find such interpositions recorded in a history so short, and occupied with matters so much more important. But that he could not fail, if opportunity offered, so to interpose on their behalf, he has himself, I think, very plainly, though indirectly, given us to infer from the remarkable prayer which is recorded in this chapter,—a prayer which does very clearly show that the restoration of his captive brethren, as involving the manifestation of the divine glory, was the object that lay nearest his heart. For this he must always have looked, and longed, and prayed. But as the time drew near when, according to the prophet Jeremiah, the captivity was to be at an end, Daniel became more urgent than ever in his supplication: "In the first year of the reign of Darius, ... I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." This earnestness of Daniel did not imply any doubt on his part of the faithfulness of the divine promise. On the contrary, it was just his faith that prompted him to set his face unto the Lord God. He felt it most befitting to acknowledge that the deliverance which he expected was altogether of free grace. He was bold and urgent, because he knew that he was asking what was in accordance with the divine will. "Daniel knew," as has been well observed, "that the Lord would be supplicated for that which he had already declared himself willing to give; as in the Psalms we constantly find that the assurance of divine help, embraced with liking faith, is always followed by new supplications on the part of God's people for the actual bestowment of the promised blessing." And Daniel, moreover, was especially copious in his confession of sin for himself and for his captive brethren, because he was well aware that though God would prove true to his promise, yet they had done enough to forfeit the fulfilment of it altogether, and, therefore, enough to render them unfit for the enjoyment, in all their fulness, of the blessings included in that promise if it were fulfilled.

It was, therefore, in holy zeal for the glory of God, and with a deep and affectionate concern for his captive brethren, that he prayed, "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

I have said of this prayer, that it is a very remarkable one. The answer which was vouchsafed to it, as recorded in the 24th and following verses, is equally remarkable. It will be observed, that what the prophet expressly prayed for was the return of captive Judah to their own land, and the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple,—that God would again establish and "make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." But the answer which he received was not limited to the subject of his prayer. That subject, in fact, is not expressly mentioned at all. The answer which he did receive does, no doubt, necessarily imply that the prophet's request was granted,—that Judah should be restored, and the holy city rebuilt. But that answer extended so far beyond all that he could ask or think, that the immediate subject of his prayer being granted is left rather to be inferred than expressly declared, while the angel hastens to disclose to him great and glorious events, of which the restoration itself was but a type. Daniel had set his face unto the Lord God, with his mind full of the seventy years during which the people of the Lord and the holy city had suffered under the righteous judgment of God; and his prayer was, that the Lord would behold their desolation, and forgive, and have mercy on them. In answer to this prayer, the angel was commanded to say, that the captive people should again be recognised as God's people, and that the city should again be the holy city for a much longer period than they had been desolate. Not seventy years, but "seventy weeks," or seventy sevens, that is, of years, "are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city." This necessarily implied, that, according to the prophet's prayer, the captive people were to be restored, and Jerusalem was to be rebuilt; for otherwise the people could not be openly recognised as God's people, nor Jerusalem as the holy city, or God's city. And when so restored, they were to continue in their revived or renovated condition, not merely as long as they had been in a state of desolation, that is, seventy years, but seventy times seven, or four hundred

and ninety years. At the end of that period, as we learn from the subsequent verses, the people, as a people, and the city, as a city, were to be overtaken with a far more sweeping and more terrible destruction than that which they had suffered at the hand of the king of Babylon.

But this did not imply that God was then to cast off his true people, the Church. On the contrary, it was just then that all the promises, on which the people of God from the beginning had lived and fed, were to be fully accomplished in the long-expected Messiah. These promises were never secured to Israel as a nation, but to the Church, which for ages was found only in the bosom of that nation; and though the nation at large shared in many of the blessings which God bestowed upon his Church, yet countless multitudes of the people in all ages had neither part nor lot in the true spiritual blessings involved in the promises which were made to the true Church, and to the true Church only. The Jews, therefore, as a people, might be scattered, and Jerusalem, as a city, might be laid in ruins, while, at the same time, the true Church was to be exalted, and her privileges enlarged, as they had never before been. Such was to be the state of things at the end of the seventy weeks, or sevens of years, during which the people of the Jews and the city of Jerusalem were to exist in their restored condition. And, accordingly, before announcing the new destruction of Jerusalem, which was to take place in consequence of the rejection of Christ by the Jews, the angel was commissioned to tell the prophet, for the comfort and encouragement of the Church, for what purpose it was that the Jews in their restored condition, and Jerusalem and the temple when rebuilt, should continue for four hundred and ninety years. It was, he says, "to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." All this was to be accomplished by the end of the four hundred and ninety years; and there is not, perhaps, to be found in Scripture, a clearer and more comprehensive statement of the mediatorial work of Christ, and of its blessed effects, than is contained in these words. The reality, as well as the infinite value of Christ's atoning sacrifice, is here placed in striking contrast with the sha-

dowy and typical nature of the atonements under the law. The object of these atonements was, no doubt, to relieve the conscience of the believing offerer from the burden of guilt, and to impart to him a sense of forgiveness, a well-grounded hope that he was accepted as righteous in the sight of God; and in so far as the worshipper offered his sacrifice in faith, he did experience relief and enlargement of heart. But the atonement was not perfect, and the relief which it afforded was not permanent. The worshipper was not so purged by his offering as to have no more conscience of sin. That offering did not so finish transgression as that, in regard to him, it was utterly forgotten; it did not so make an end of sin as that he felt it no longer chargeable against him with its condemning power; it did not furnish to him in itself what he could regard as a perfect ground of reconciliation to God; and it was but the shadow of that perfect righteousness in which alone the sinner can be accepted as righteous. And all this the apostle plainly teaches, in the estimate which he gives us of the value and the efficacy of the sacrifices under the law. "For the law," says he, "having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year."

But that which had for many ages been only thus shadowed forth, was, according to the communication made to Daniel, to be accomplished in reality within or at the close of the period of seventy times seven years, during which the Jews, as a nation, and Jerusalem, as a city, were to continue in their restored condition; and then it was to be fully accomplished by the offering of the one great sacrifice, of which all former sacrifices were promises and types. The infinite value, too, of that one sacrifice, as well as its blessed effects, is very emphatically set forth. Every form of expression is employed to give assurance to the people of God of the completeness, the perfection, the all-sufficiency of Messiah's work. It was "to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." In a word, it

was to make the comers thereunto perfect as pertaining to the conscience. It was, moreover, "to seal up the vision and prophecy,"—that is, to fulfil all that had been prefigured and foretold of the great work of reconciliation, as that the Church would no longer depend for consolation and comfort on the promise of a future atonement, the atonement itself being actually made and set forth as the sure and clearly revealed ground of hope to sinners. And, finally, the work of Christ was to consist in anointing the most Holy, or anointing a Holy of Holies. In the material temple of old, the Holy of Holies was that apartment in which was deposited the ark of the covenant, and where originally the cloud of glory appeared over the mercy-seat; and it was this apartment especially that was the house of God, the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory. But the temple itself, even when possessing the glorious symbol of the divine presence, was but a type of the Church,—the spiritual temple which "the man whose name is The Branch" was to build, and which was to be an habitation of God by the indwelling of the Spirit in his life-giving and sanctifying power. And this, I apprehend, is the most Holy, or Holy of Holies, which it is here foretold Christ was to anoint or consecrate, when, having finished transgression, and made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness, and fulfilled all former visions and prophecies, he ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, and received gifts for men, yea, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

Such was the clear and comprehensive representation of the mediatorial work of Christ which was vouchsafed to the prophet in answer to his prayer. Nor was this all. The precise time within which all this was to be accomplished was expressly revealed to him: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks." The expression, "commandment," or word, "to restore and to build Jerusalem," will be found to be applicable only to the time mentioned in the second chapter of Nehemiah, being the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king. Previously to that period, various commandments had gone forth in favour of the Jews, and for the

restoration of the temple. There was the proclamation of Cyrus setting the captives free, with permission to rebuild the house of God at Jerusalem. There was, in like manner, the decree in the second year of Darius, granting authority to the Jews to resume the work of rebuilding the temple, which their enemies had succeeded in arresting. And there was a similar order issued in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, which greatly encouraged Ezra and his companions to carry on and complete the work of the house of the Lord. But all this while, Jerusalem itself was in a most ruinous state, as we find from the very affecting description given of it by Nehemiah; and it was only on his application to Artaxerxes for permission to go thither, that the city really began to be restored and rebuilt, as predicted in the words before us. Nor was it the permission or royal letter of Artaxerxes that is here called the commandment or word which went forth for restoring and rebuilding Jerusalem. It was the word or commandment of Jehovah that was to go forth in answer to Nehemiah's prayer, and was ultimately to raise Jerusalem from its ruins. It, no doubt, went forth in connection with that permission, but it was itself the efficient power. And this Nehemiah was careful to tell his brethren at Jerusalem; for we find him saying, "I told them of the hand of my God, which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me."

The commencement, then, of the seventy weeks, or seventy times seven years, is to be dated from the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, when Nehemiah's prayer, that he might find favour with the king, and be permitted to go and rebuild Jerusalem, was heard and answered. And the whole period of seventy weeks is divided into three periods,—seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks, and one week. During the first period, the city was to be rebuilt, and restored to something like its former state, but in troublous times,—a prediction which was fulfilled in the many difficulties with which the Jews had to contend, and which began even in Nehemiah's time. At the end of the second period of sixty-two weeks, being sixty-nine in all from the beginning, Messiah was to appear,—a period which has been found to correspond with the commencement of the Saviour's public ministry, when he was thirty years of age. After these sixty-two weeks, or sixty-nine in all, "Messiah" was to be "cut

off, but not for himself." How long after the sixty-nine weeks this was to happen is not here said. But it is expressly stated in the following verse, where it is said, that in the midst of the one week,—that is, the seventieth,—he should "cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease,"—that is, by the one offering of himself, he abrogated or put an end to all other sacrifices. The unbelieving Jews, of course, would continue to offer sacrifices. But they had no longer authority to do so. Such offerings had ceased to be divine institutions, and their continuing to observe them was the guilty consequence of their guilty conduct in rejecting Messiah. The prediction, as may be gathered from the Gospel history, was fulfilled to the letter, inasmuch as Christ was crucified in the fourth year of his public ministry, being the midst of what we have already seen to be the seventieth week. During the whole of that week, it is said in the prediction, that he was to "confirm the covenant with many." And this he did, partly by his own personal ministry, whereby many were brought to believe in him, and partly by the ministry of his apostles, after they received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; so that, by the end of the seventieth week, or seven years after Christ publicly appeared, countless multitudes had become partakers of all the blessings of the new covenant, and a commission had been given to carry the offer of these blessings to every nation on the earth. And while the prophet was thus told, in precise terms, of the time, and manner, and blessed consequences of Messiah's appearing, he was told, also, though not so definitely in regard to time, of the desolation that was afterwards to overtake Jerusalem. He was told that the people of a prince that should come should destroy the city and the sanctuary,—that the end thereof should be with a flood,—that is, irresistible and overwhelming; and that, because of the overspreading of abominations, it should be made desolate.

The prince who should do all this was undoubtedly the Roman power, as the event showed. But the abominations which caused the desolation were chargeable on the Jews themselves. They had rendered the sanctuary, or temple, abominable in the sight of God. It was so with the first temple. The apostate kings of Judah not only filled Jerusalem with idols, but placed these idols within the very precincts of the house of God; and, therefore, as

a polluted thing, it was consigned to the flames. But how much more polluted and abominable in the sight of God did the second temple become, when He who was the true Sheckinah, "the brightness of his," the Father's, "glory, and the express image of his person," and who had honoured that temple with his presence, rendering it unspeakably more glorious than the former had ever been, was rejected, crucified, and slain? From the moment that guilty deed was done, the doom of that house was sealed. The wrath of God was to come upon it to the uttermost. Such were the great and momentous events foretold within the narrow limits of this short prophecy. And with what admiration should we contemplate its precise fulfilment, and the illustration which that fulfilment affords, of the almighty power of Jehovah, his infinite wisdom, his unchangeable faithfulness, his unsearchable grace and mercy! But I would especially advert to the example which it furnishes, among many, of the honour which God puts upon prayer. Daniel was expressly told that at the beginning of his supplication, the angel was sent to tell him that his request was granted. And this was but a small part of the gracious communication which was vouchsafed. Daniel prayed only for the fulfilment of a promise for the deliverance and consolation of the Church in his own day. But he received, in answer, promises which were to sustain the faith and hope of the Church for many ages, and which, now that they are fulfilled, are in some respects richer still in encouragement and instruction to the people of God. And such is the principle on which God still acts in regard to the prayers of his believing people, when they pray for what is in accordance with his will, and fitted to advance his glory. All are not privileged and honoured as Daniel was. But to all who truly and zealously seek his glory, the promise is given, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear;" and the promise will be fulfilled in his doing for them abundantly, above all that they are able to ask or think.

LVIII.

ISRAEL SHALL SEEK THE LORD AND DAVID THEIR KING.

HOSEA III. 4, 5.

In this chapter, as in the preceding, backsliding Israel is set forth under the figure of an unfaithful wife. In the communication here made to the prophet, he is virtually told that if he would understand or rightly conceive of the ingratitude with which Israel had repaid the divine goodness, he must go and redeem one whom he loved from a state of slavery, and whom he would continue to treat with affection and tenderness, but who would requite all his love and kindness with ingratitude and unfaithfulness. He is then commanded to go and tell the people,—of course, in the way of type or parable,—that he had made the experiment, and had tasted all the bitterness of ill-requited love. And in telling them so, he set before them a representation of their own character and conduct, so faithful and so striking as that it was hardly possible for them to misunderstand it. They could not have forgotten,—indeed, their national pride would have prevented them forgetting,—what great things God had done on their behalf. He had, indeed, purchased them for himself. He redeemed them from a state of slavery and degradation in the land of Egypt. He bare them on eagles' wings, and brought them unto himself, that they might be a peculiar treasure unto him above all people. "He found him," that is, Israel, "in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." He took them into cove-

nant with him, and was an husband unto them. Of all this, the figurative language of the prophet could hardly fail to remind them; nor can we easily conceive how they could avoid seeing that his object was to charge them with ingratitude and unfaithfulness towards Him who had been an husband unto them, and at whose hand they had experienced such marvellous and long-continued kindness, compassion, and forbearance. But they were not permitted to overlook this application of the prophet's parable, if they were disposed to do so; for he goes on to state, how he was constrained to act, in the way of severity, towards her who had dealt so unfaithfully by him,—namely, to place her for a time, even for a long time, in a state of desertion or widowhood. And then he proceeds to tell them that the parable which he had spoken was a typical representation of their unfaithfulness in forsaking the Lord, and going after other gods, and of the judgment with which that unfaithfulness was to be visited: "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim." But they were not to be utterly and for ever cast off. Though their state of desertion and bereavement was to be for many days, it was not to be permanent. As intimated in the preceding type, and, indeed, through the whole of the former chapters of this book, God was to remember them still, even in their widowhood, and would yet "betroth" them unto himself "in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies;" for it is added in the passage before us, "Afterwards,"—that is, after the many days during which Israel were to be without a king, and without a prince, and without any of the ordinances in which they recognised their relation to God as his people,—"afterwards shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days."

The passage before us, then, like innumerable other passages in the prophets, contains, first, a prediction of the captivity of Israel and Judah; and, second, a promise of their ultimate restoration. In regard to the first, we know, from the fact of the captivity having taken place, that the solemn warning had no salutary effect on the nation at large; for had they taken the

warning, and returned in penitence and faith to Him who had condescended to call himself their husband, they would never have been carried into captivity. Yet there might be some, even a great many, who were awakened by that warning to a sense of their ingratitude and folly, and were persuaded to return to Him from whom they had revolted and gone astray. To them, therefore, and to those who had never gone after idols, the promise of restoration must have been very precious. The fulfilment of that promise, indeed, was a very distant thing; for the captivity itself was still distant. But the promise assured them that God was not to cast off his people for ever; and, therefore, though they might not live even to experience the bitterness of the captivity, far less to participate in the blessings of the restoration, still they had the assurance, that if they did cleave to the God of their fathers as their God, they would, like their fathers, share in the blessings of the covenant sworn unto Abraham. In all this, the prophecy before us simply says what is said in many passages both of this and of the other prophetical books. But there is one expression which gives a peculiar force to the promise which it contains. It is said of the penitent children of Israel, that they should "return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King." This last expression is very full of meaning. It will be recollected that the kingdom of Israel consisted of ten of the tribes who revolted from Rehoboam, the son and successor of Solomon, and chose Jeroboam for their king, thus leaving to Rehoboam the tribe of Judah only, and Benjamin. The immediate cause of this sad event was the folly of Rehoboam, in not only refusing to diminish, but resolving to increase the heavy burdens which his father Solomon had laid upon the people; and the event had, moreover, been foretold by the prophet Ahijah, as the punishment of the sin of Solomon, in being drawn away in his old age into idolatry. But all this neither excused nor mitigated the sin of the people in rebelling against the house of David, and ultimately turning their back on Jerusalem, the place which God had chosen to put his name there. The kingdom of Israel had been given to David and to his descendants by solemn promise; for the prophet Nathan was expressly commanded to say to him, "The Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house. And thine house

and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." It was, moreover, said of David's son, who was to sit on his throne, "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed."

It was thus in the line of kings descending from David that God had declared his purpose of fulfilling all the good things which his mouth had spoken concerning "Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance;" for that line was to terminate in the person of Messiah, to whom should be given the throne of his father David, that he might "reign over the house of Jacob for ever," and of whose kingdom there should be no end. When the ten tribes, then, rebelled against the house of David, they virtually relinquished all interest in the blessings of David's kingdom. Indeed, they avowedly did so. Their revolt was not merely the rejection of the authority of Rehoboam personally, because of his haughty and tyrannical conduct. They utterly abjured all submission or allegiance to the successors of David in the throne; for "when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David." This was the language of impiety, as well as passion. It reminds us of the still more fearful language of the Jews at a later period, when they not only rejected their lawful King, but clamorously demanded his crucifixion, saying, "His blood be on us, and on our children." The ten tribes did not resist such palpable evidence as the Jews who crucified Christ resisted, nor did they blaspheme so openly and so grossly as the Jews blasphemed. But they rejected all the exceeding great and precious promises which were made to the Church through David and through the heir of his throne. They declared that they had no desire to have any lot or portion in the blessings of the kingdom, which God declared he had established for ever in the house of David,—that is, the kingdom of Messiah. And while they avowed their contempt for the blessings of that kingdom, they openly declared, also, that they were not afraid to defy its power. "Now," said they, "see to thine own house, David,"

as if they believed that their revolt would prove the utter overthrow and extinction of David's throne and kingdom. All this was very like the guilty infatuation of their posterity who rejected the blessings and defied the power of Messiah himself personally. And their daring language was followed up by corresponding conduct. They chose Jeroboam for their king. He, with consummate skill, seduced them into idolatry, persuading them that the golden calves which he set up in Dan and Bethel afforded places of worship and of sacrifice more convenient for them, and not less acceptable to God than the temple at Jerusalem did. From the moment of their revolt, then, which was in reality a revolt from God, they became a nation of idolaters. There were some, indeed, a remnant, who never disowned their allegiance to the house of David, nor ever bowed the knee to the idols of Jeroboam; for there are notices to be found in the Book of Kings which plainly show that there were some,—nay, not a few at times, among the ten tribes, who eagerly sought to go up to Jerusalem to the temple service there,—though, of course, they must have often been prevented from doing so by the wars which frequently prevailed between the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel. But with these exceptions, the people of Israel became a nation of idolaters. Their rebellion against the house of David was apostasy from God; and notwithstanding the remonstrances and warnings of the numerous prophets that were sent to them, their downward course to ruin was almost uninterrupted. It is recorded of king after king who reigned over them, that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord," till at length the king of Assyria carried them into captivity, thereby fulfilling the word which was spoken by Ahijah the prophet, the same prophet who had foretold their revolt from the house of David: "And the Lord shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin."

Bearing in mind, then, these facts in the history of Israel, we cannot fail to perceive that there is a peculiar force in the language here employed, when the prophet foretells the future restoration of Israel, as connected with their returning and seeking, not only the Lord their God, but also David their king. When they departed from the house of David, they departed also from Jehovah their God; and it was only, therefore, by

being again united to David's house that they could again return unto the Lord. This truth was illustrated at the restoration of Judah from the captivity of Babylon. There is reason to believe that some, at least, of the kingdom of Israel participated in that restoration, and returned again to their own land. But if so, it was only by putting themselves under the authority and protection of Zerubbabel, the representative at that time of the royal house of David, who conducted captive Judah from Babylon to Jerusalem. But any partial restoration of Israel which might take place at that time was rather a token of the future fulfilment of this prediction than the fulfilment itself. The prediction referred mainly to Gospel times, and, as in other parts of the prophetical writings, it is Christ who is here called "David their King." His appearing, indeed, did not immediately effect the accomplishment of the promise. On the contrary, it was the occasion of a revolt from the house of David, and an apostasy from God, still guiltier and more daring than that of the ten tribes. He was the rightful heir of the throne of Israel; and in his person the kingdom of David was to be established an everlasting kingdom. Yet he was rejected,—nay, crucified and put to death. And what more could they do to fill up the measure of their iniquity, and to bring wrath upon themselves to the uttermost? They had deliberately, and in language the most daringly blasphemous, relinquished, for themselves and for their children, all lot and portion in Him who was the author of all the mighty deliverances which had been wrought for their fathers, and by whom was to be fulfilled all that God had promised yet to do for Israel.

And might it not have been supposed that they had at length forfeited and lost for ever all interest in the blessings so promised? Yet scarcely was the guilty deed perpetrated, when a new token or pledge was given that the promise would assuredly be fulfilled. The apostles were commissioned to proclaim pardon and reconciliation with God through the blood of Christ, even to those by whom that blood had been shed; and though the Jews, as a nation, continued to reject the counsel of God against themselves, yet thousands in Jerusalem itself, and multitudes in other parts of Judea, were persuaded to seek the Lord their God, and David their King,—even him whom they had "taken, and with

wicked hands" had "crucified and slain." The prediction was thus fulfilled in the experience of not a few who had apparently forfeited, beyond the hope of recovery, all interest in the blessings therein promised. The death of Christ, by which they had incurred such enormous guilt, made ample provision for the pardon even of that guilt. This pardon was freely offered to them all in the proclamation of the Gospel, and multitudes, as we have seen, were persuaded and enabled to embrace that offer. The same Gospel still continues to be proclaimed; and what the Spirit accomplished with it before, he can and he will accomplish with it again. The day of Pentecost witnessed the commencement of a work which will, assuredly, one day be finished. It is especially the work of the Spirit, and his power is adequate to carry on and finish it. The Jews, it is true, for wise and righteous purposes, have already been "many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice." But so they once were before; yet God still remembered them. So now he is not forgetful, nor "slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness;" and the children of Israel shall yet "return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days."

But what is thus needful for the return of Israel and their reconciliation to God is equally needful in every case of a sinner's conversion. Both are effected by the same power, and through the same means. When the apostles left their unbelieving countrymen and turned to the Gentiles, they carried with them the same Gospel, and proclaimed the same precious truth; and in every case where that truth was believed, it was the operation of the same Spirit that rendered it "the power of God unto salvation," "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." In regard, indeed, to the great question, how men stand related to God, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. "We have before proved both," says the apostle, "that they are all under sin,"—that "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." The Jews, it is true, did, in a peculiar manner, incur the divine displeasure; for they abused, or failed to improve privileges which had not been granted to Gentiles of that time. They sinned against the light of revelation, as well as against the dictates of conscience; and their

peculiarly aggravated guilt was visited with a peculiarly severe punishment. "The kingdom of God," the blessings of which they neither improved nor estimated, was taken from them, "and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." They were deprived even of the worldly privileges which alone they valued and gloried in; their city and their temple which they had profaned, and rendered hateful in the sight of God, were laid in ashes; and they were themselves scattered abroad to be a byword and a hissing among all nations. Wrath came upon them unto the uttermost. But all, as well as they, "are by nature the children of wrath." And if so, then what will it avail any of us that we have not aggravated the guilt and misery of our condition in the way that the Jews did? or that we have not been made the subjects of such an outward and visible manifestation of that wrath as was visited upon them? Surely the fact that we are by nature the children of wrath is so unspeakably terrible, that it can be no relief to us, no mitigation of the misery of our condition, to think that others have been or still are somewhat guiltier than ourselves. It were to treat the righteous displeasure of God as a light thing, did we seek comfort in the thought that we have incurred that displeasure in a somewhat less degree than others have done. The very idea of so thinking of the wrath of God would itself be more than sufficient to bring up our guilt to the full amount of what they have incurred whom we regard as guiltier than ourselves. But even if we were disposed to rely in any measure or degree on the miserable plea, that we have not incurred the divine displeasure as the Jews incurred it, I fear that the plea would fail us,—that it would be found inadmissible. For what was it that aggravated the sin of the Jews? It was that they sinned against light. They had the Old Testament Scriptures, where Christ was set forth throughout in every form of promise and typical representation, in his person, and character, and work, and kingdom; and all that was thus foretold of him they professedly believed, and looked forward with earnest and longing expectation to see fulfilled. But when Christ came, corresponding in all respects to what had been predicted of him, so little did they feel their spiritual necessities, and, therefore, so utterly did they misunderstand his character and work, that they rejected him.

But wherein did they differ in all this from mere nominal Christians now, who know all that the Jews knew, and profess to believe more than the Jews believed, concerning Christ; but who, nevertheless, have not deliberately and unreservedly given themselves to him, to be saved and sanctified by him, on his own terms, and in his own way? The real conversion of an Israelite now to the faith of the Gospel may appear a very wonderful thing, after many centuries during which Israelites have openly and avowedly declared that they hold it to be a cunningly devised fable. But, in reality, it is not more wonderful than the conversion of a nominal into a true Christian. The mere nominal Christian no more believes in Christ than does the unconverted Israelite. Neither the one nor the other has ever really felt his need of such a Saviour as Christ is. But were they both awakened to a true sense of that need, the earnest inquiry with both would be precisely the same. Of Israelites, when so awakened, we are told that they will "return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King,"—even the Messiah, whom their forefathers crucified. They will say, as their fathers said, who were convicted under the preaching of Peter, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And so in regard to awakened sinners now,—even those who have long professed to believe the Gospel, and who fancied that they did believe it, just because they had been familiar with it all their life long, and had never thought of seriously doubting it. So long as they could contrive to live contentedly in this state, without any real apprehension of their guilt and danger, drawing their enjoyments and their happiness from the world, their fancied belief of the Gospel, instead of ministering to them any substantial comfort in the prospect of death and eternity, served only to help them in shutting out all serious thoughts of these momentous subjects. But when made to feel that they are guilty before God, their inquiry also will be, "What must I do to be saved?" and they will be convinced, that what they thought was faith in Christ is far too vague and unmeaning a thing to afford them any solid ground of hope that they are forgiven. They will feel that Christ must be to them as a Mediator,—what he has never yet been,—before they can approach God with confidence, or reckon on finding acceptance with him. They will then understand, that what is

here said of penitent Israel is equally applicable to penitent Gentiles,—that in seeking God as their God, they must seek David also as their King, in and by whom alone they can know God as their gracious and reconciled Father. This doctrine is, in fact, just the doctrine which is taught in the New Testament, when it is said that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,"—that there is no salvation in any other than in him, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,"—that he is "the way, and the truth, and the life,"—and that "no man cometh unto the Father but by Him."

The truth in the passage under consideration, then, is one with which we are all familiar, and which, as a matter of opinion, all will be ready to admit; for in professing to believe the Gospel, we declare that we look for salvation only through Christ. But have we known this truth practically and experimentally? Have we had such convictions of guilt as compelled us to acknowledge that we stand righteously condemned in the sight of God, and are justly deserving of his wrath and curse? and have we had such a sense of danger as convinced us that the most momentous of all questions is, "What must I do to be saved?" and that until this question be satisfactorily determined, we can have no true peace, no real enjoyment, no permanent rest? It is by such views of their state and character in the sight of God, as the holy and righteous Lawgiver, that sinners are made to feel their need of a Mediator, and are constrained seriously to inquire in what way the Mediator's work can become available to them. They will then begin to read, and hear, and think of Christ, as they never did before; nor will they be at rest until they have some good ground to hope, not only that he is willing to undertake, but that he has undertaken for them,—that they have an interest in his atoning sacrifice, and a place in his intercession,—and that he is Mediator between God and them. All this he has declared himself willing to be and to do on behalf of as many as seek to and confide in him. And when, on the warrant of his own invitation, they are persuaded to seek him, and, on the ground of his own promise, are enabled to commit their case into his hand, believing that he will accomplish for them all that he has promised, then they begin to experience the

fulfilment of the prediction, "The children of Israel shall fear the Lord, and his goodness in the latter days."

The expression is very emphatic. It implies, that the fear of the Lord,—that reverential godly fear, which we find frequently used in Scripture to denote the whole of true religion,—can only exist in connection with the hope of pardon, a sense of the divine favour. It is this hope of forgiveness, this experience of the grace and goodness of God, that subdues the stubborn and rebellious hearts of sinners, melts them into godly sorrow and contrition, and renders them as much ashamed of sin as they once were afraid of its consequences. And so we are elsewhere told in Scripture. Thus, in the prophecies of Ezekiel, we find the Lord thus addressing his captive people, "I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done." And again, "I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. . . . . And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. . . . . Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations." And the same truth is stated in a more general form by the psalmist, in the 130th Psalm, when he says, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." This, it is obvious, is the same truth that is here stated, when it is predicted of the children of Israel that they should fear the Lord and his goodness. Forgiveness and goodness may, perhaps, appear to some a strange reason for fearing the Lord. But to believers it is very plain and simple; for with them it is a matter of experience. With men, in their unregenerate state,—their state of alienation from God,—there may be much of what they would call fear of him, that is, a slavish dread of his displeasure and of its consequences; and at times, when they are compelled to think seriously of him, and are not able to shake off the suspicions which haunt them regarding the reckoning which awaits them, their fear may be well-nigh over-

whelming. But it is a fear which will prompt them to make their escape from God, if they can. There is nothing in it even of that reverence which is due from the creature to the Creator, —far less any thing of that admiration of the divine excellence which can awaken the desire of knowing still more of the divine character. On the contrary, it is a fear which will strengthen their aversion to solemn and serious thoughts of God. It will tempt them to think of him as little as they can; and when they cannot shut him out of their thoughts, it will dispose them to wish that he were less holy than he is, less righteous, and less rigorous in enforcing the authority of his law. It is a fear which, so far from being awakened or strengthened by the hope of forgiveness and a sense of the divine goodness, would be altogether dissipated, could they only persuade themselves that they will at least be forgiven at last; and there is but too much reason to suspect that it is by some such unfounded and delusive hope that they contrive to make their escape from a fear which can only disturb or torment them.

But how different this from the fear of the Lord and of his goodness here spoken of! It is that profound reverence and holy awe of the divine majesty and greatness which the highest and purest of God's intelligent creatures may and do cherish, and to an extent which feeble men cannot conceive of. In the case of believers, indeed, that fear is mingled with feelings of deep humility and self-abasement because of sin. But there is nothing in this to render the fear of the Lord, which has been awakened in their souls, a painful or unwelcome feeling. The unspotted holiness and the unchangeable rectitude which awaken their reverence are presented to them in the cross of Christ, in connection with a love of infinite depth, a compassion and tenderness altogether divine. God, even in all the inflexible justice of his character as the Lawgiver, is no longer the object of slavish dread to them; for their Substitute and Surety has satisfied the demands of his law in their name, and he is pacified towards them for all that they have done. They can never, indeed, forget what they have done, nor ever cease deeply to lament and deplore it. But he upbraids them not; and his divine generosity, while it humbles them the more, awakens also and strengthens their holy, child-like fear of offending him,—a fear which is alike

affectionate and reverential, and which, as it grows in strength, is accompanied with a growing admiration of the divine excellence, and a growing desire for closer fellowship with God, and larger discoveries of his character and perfections. It is a simple subject of inquiry, then,—but a very solemn one,—whether we have any experimental knowledge of such a state of mind and feeling towards God,—whether we have returned and sought the Lord our God, and David our King,—and whether we have yet begun to fear the Lord and his goodness?

LIX.

THE RAISING OF THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID.

AMOS IX. 11, 12.

THE preceding verses of this chapter contain one prediction, among many to be found in the writings of the prophets, of the judgments that were suspended over the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but the execution of which was still mercifully delayed, to give the backsliding people a place of repentance. Amos prophesied about sixty or seventy years before the captivity of Israel by the Assyrians, and nearly two hundred years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah by the Babylonians. But even at that early period, the certainty as well as the extent of the judgments which were to overtake both kingdoms, was as clearly revealed to Amos as to those prophets who, at a later period, foretold their immediate execution, and, indeed, actually witnessed it. Nor is the language in which he describes these judgments less solemn and precise than theirs. In the first verse he relates a vision that appeared to him, in which he "saw the Lord standing upon the altar," saying, "Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them;" or, as some render it, "and dash them upon the head of all,"—that is, of all who were assembled to offer upon the altar; "and I will slay the last," or remainder, "of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered." Of this vision it has been remarked, that it is in sub-

stance the vision which appeared to Ezekiel, a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem, as recorded in the 9th chapter of his prophecies. The two differed, indeed, in outward appearance, or manner. But both were visions of judgment; and in both the judgment is represented as beginning at the house of God. In that which appeared to Amos, he "saw the Lord standing upon the altar," and he heard him give commandment to smite the lintel of the door, that the posts might shake, and that the house might fall and overwhelm those who officiated or worshipped there. The scene of Ezekiel's vision was the temple also, where "the glory of the God of Israel appeared at the threshold of the house," whence a command issued to go through the midst of Jerusalem, and to set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sighed and that cried for all the abominations that were done in the midst thereof. This done, the Lord commanded those who were commissioned to execute his judgments, saying, "Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark, and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house."

The two visions, then, though differing somewhat in the manner of the judgment, and though separated, in point of time, by nearly two hundred years, were in substance the same,—both being a vivid representation of the judgment that was coming upon God's backsliding people. But the point of agreement to which I would especially refer is this,—that in both the judgment threatened was to begin at the house of the Lord,—even at the very altar. This was very significant. It implied that the guilt of the people was, as it were, accumulated upon or concentrated in the temple; and that the place which God had chosen to put his name there had by their sin become the vilest and most loathsome of all places in the sight of God. It was there that their united homage was to be paid to God, as the only living and true God. It was there that God met with them, speaking to them from the holy oracle, through the high priest. And there it was that the large and rich blessing was pronounced upon them, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance

upon thee, and give thee peace." But their submission was a feigned submission. Their worship degenerated into the hypocritical service of the lips, and they profaned the very temple itself with their idolatries; for it is said of them, in the book of Ezekiel, "When they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house." It was befitting, then, that the place where they had enjoyed the best and richest of their privileges, should be the place, also, where the judgment which they had incurred should begin to be executed. It was in reference to the temple at Jerusalem that both Israel and Judah did, in an especial manner, manifest their guilt and ungodliness. Israel, or the ten tribes, turned their backs upon it altogether, and erected idolatrous altars at Dan and Bethel; and Judah set up idols in the temple itself. It was, therefore, in connection with the temple, that the fierce anger of the Lord is represented as first breaking out. It is not necessary to suppose that there is any special allusion to the actual destruction of the material temple by the Babylonians. It was rather a figurative intimation that the house of God, which was designed to be, and which had for a time been, a pledge of their safety,—a token that they were dwelling "in the secret place of the Most High," and abiding "under the shadow of the Almighty,"—had become a token of his displeasure and of the ruin that awaited them. And the sanctuary itself having thus ceased to afford them any protection, they were warned that nowhere else would they find a refuge from coming wrath. It was the wrath of the omnipotent and omnipresent Jehovah; and, therefore, to escape from it was impossible. And so they are assured, in the second and following verses, in language equally solemn and sublime: "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: and though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good. . . . .

All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us."

Such was the awful threatening addressed to Israel and Judah. But it has been recorded as a part of Scripture, and therefore it must be profitable still, as all Scripture is. And, indeed, it is very obviously so; for is there not too much reason to fear that in communities professedly Christian, there are multitudes to whom the warning in this passage is as applicable as it was to Israel of old, and in reference to a judgment unspeakably more terrible than any temporal calamity however disastrous? The final judgment awaits all,—that great and terrible day of the Lord, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and when it will be rendered unto all men according to their deeds. Is there not reason to fear that there are multitudes who say, or at least secretly flatter themselves, that the evil of that day shall not overtake them, though they have never been really in earnest in seeking the refuge where alone they can be safe? And is there not reason to fear also, that they are strengthened in this their delusion by the consideration that they believe, as they suppose, the truths of the Gospel, and that they are careful to observe its ordinances, while, in truth, their very Christian profession is that which will rise up in judgment against them, as the privileges of Israel testified against them? And as Israel were warned that the very sanctuary, which they thought was their stronghold, would prove the scene of their ruin, and that no other place would be found where they could take refuge; so hypocrites or false professors,—self-deceivers,—who are satisfied with a name to live while they are dead, are here also warned that there will be no escape for them. The figurative language here employed, in which God declares of those on whom he was to execute his righteous judgment, that though they should dig into hell to hide themselves, thence should his hand take them; that though they should climb up to heaven, thence should he bring them down; that though they hid themselves in the top of Carmel, he would search and take them out thence; and though they were hid from his sight, as they supposed, in the bottom of the sea, thence would he command the serpent, and he would bite them;—this language, I say, is just a very sublime and

solemn representation of the omniscience and omnipotence of God, as the holy and heart-searching God, who will "bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

The threatenings contained in these first ten verses were addressed to the whole people of Israel and Judah. But the history of both kingdoms, subsequently to the time of Amos, does but too clearly show that by the people at large these solemn warnings were disregarded. Israel continued to backslide, even without the appearance of repentance or return to God; and though partial reformations did from time to time take place in Judah, yet they were but partial and of short duration. Still, there were some who either had remained steadfast in God's covenant, or, though in a state of backsliding and coldness, had not been drawn into utter apostasy; and to them these threatenings would be very depressing,—or rather, if not mitigated or softened, utterly overwhelming. But it was not designed that they should be driven to despair, by being left to suppose that God was to forsake and give up his Church for ever. The judgments foretold were, indeed, certainly to be executed; and, judging only from the announcement of these calamities, it might appear as if even a remnant of Israel and Judah could not be saved,—as if it had been determined that they should be as Sodom, and be made like unto Gomorrah. But at the very moment that the judgments here foretold were to be executed in all their severity, and when nothing was to be looked for but that a full end was to be made of Israel and Judah, God was to visit and refresh his heritage, as it had never before been visited, and to work out a deliverance for them, such as they had never before experienced. The promise of this deliverance is given in the passage before us. To the people at large, that promise would have no value; for they who despised the threatened judgment could see nothing real in the predicted deliverance. But the Church, for whom the promise was designed, would feel it to be very precious,—not only the Church of the prophet's own time, but God's people of all subsequent times. The terms, too, in which the promise is expressed, must have been very animating and encouraging to them: "In that day,"—the day or time when the judgments foretold in the preceding verses were to be executed to the uttermost,

and when the Church was to be brought to the lowest point of weakness and humiliation,—"In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David, which is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof."

The subject of the promise, then, is the restoration of the royal house of David from a state of decay,—a promise which implied that the previously foretold judgments would be inflicted,—but which did also declare, very emphatically, that God had not forgotten them, and would not fail to fulfil his promise to David: "Thine house and my kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." The decay of David's house began with the revolt of the ten tribes, whereby his successors were left with the tribe of Judah only. In consequence of the ungodliness of not a few of these successors, the kingdom was still further weakened by the visitation of divine judgments,—famine, pestilence, and the sword; and when, for all this, they turned not unto the Lord, they were at last delivered into the hand of the heathen, and king and people were carried into captivity. This was the great calamity which the prophets were especially commissioned to foretell; and when it did overtake the people, first Israel, and then Judah, the true Church might have been ready to conclude that the tabernacle of David was fallen for ever, had it not been for such promises as that here recorded, and for which their hope must have perished; for that hope had been for ages bound up with the stability of David's house and throne. Hence the unspeakable preciousness of this prediction to the people of God, especially during the period of their exile in a foreign land. But even at that period the tabernacle of David had not fallen so low as it was still destined to fall. It was, subsequently to that, partially restored in the return of captive Judah from Babylon under a prince and representative of the house of David. But the time came when the sceptre was about to depart altogether from Judah,—when no one appeared to assert or to vindicate his right to the throne,—and when the kingdom was to pass into the hands of the heathen, degraded to the condition of a mere province of the Roman empire. Then it was that the tabernacle was indeed fallen, apparently never to rise again; and then also was the faithfulness of the promise to be tested and gloriously

vindicated. While the temporal kingdom was passing away, and while the true Church itself was reduced to a very low estate, the throne of David was to be exalted as it had never been before, for then was announced the birth of Him of whom it was said, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

We are thus naturally led, I think, by this passage itself, to look for its fulfilment in the person of Christ, of whom and of whose kingdom David and his kingdom, even in all their glory, were but types or figures. And this interpretation is in accordance with the express testimony of an inspired apostle; for it is declared in the 15th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, that this prediction referred to the ingathering of Gentiles as well as Jews into the kingdom of Christ. In an assembly of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, James thus addressed the brethren:— "Simeon hath declared, how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophet; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." And while the apostle has thus directed us where to find the fulfilment of this promise, he has taught us also how we are to interpret or understand it. It was mainly a promise of the admission of Gentiles into the true Church. Of course, this was not promised to the exclusion of Jews. On the contrary, the very restoration of the tabernacle of David implied that it was designed, in the first instance, for the reception of David's former subjects, if they could be persuaded to avail themselves of it; and, accordingly, the Gospel, comprehending all the blessings of Messiah's kingdom, was in the first instance, and for a time, exclusively preached to the Jews. But the promise was not limited to the restoration of the tabernacle of David, so as to provide a refuge or sure dwelling-place for Israel and Judah. It was to be extended or enlarged, so as to make room for the nations to dwell there, as we find it

expressed by another prophet: "Enlarge the place of rest, and let them stretch forth the curtains of my habitation: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes: for thou shalt reach forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." And so it is here said, "I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess,"—or, as the words have been rendered, "that it," the tabernacle, "may receive the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name."

This promise of the ultimate ingathering of the Gentiles is very large and comprehensive, including all the nations. But it is rendered still more emphatic by the special mention that is made of Edom, or rather of the remnant of Edom. As early as the time of Balaam, who was employed by the king of Moab to curse Israel on their way to Canaan, but was compelled to bless them, and, moreover, was made the instrument of giving utterance to a very sublime prediction of Christ, we find special mention made of Edom as one of the kingdoms which were to be brought into subjection to the glorious person, the King of Israel, whose coming Balaam was constrained to foretell: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Seth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies: and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion." In partial fulfilment, or I would rather say, in typical fulfilment of this remarkable prediction, we find it thus written in the Second Book of Samuel, 8th chapter: "And he,"—that is, David,—"put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons: and all they of Edom became David's servants." Subsequently to this, in the days of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "the Edomites revolted from under the dominion of Judah, because the house of David had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers;" and it appears from numerous passages in the writings of the prophets, that Edom became one of the bitterest and most cruel of the enemies of Judah, and was the object of some of the severest threatenings which the prophets were com-

manded to denounce. One of these threatenings we find recorded in the first chapter of the book before us, "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever: but I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah." The special mention of Edom, then, as among the nations that were to be received into the restored and enlarged tabernacle of David, gives peculiar force to the promises in the passage under consideration. Formerly they had been brought into subjection to the temporal authority of David, and had been made to contribute to his renown, as they added to the extent of his conquests. But this was only typical of their future subjugation to the spiritual authority of Christ, which, as the apostle teaches us, is the subject of the prediction in the passage before us. If, therefore, notwithstanding all their bitter enmity against the cause and the people of God, and all the wrath which they had thereby incurred, the remnant even of Edom should be received into the tabernacle of David, or, in other words, should be admitted to a participation in all the blessings of Messiah's kingdom, then what obstacle could there be in the way of any of the Gentiles returning and seeking after God, and finding acceptance with him?

The passage before us, then, is a very emphatic prediction that provision was to be made by Christ's appearing for gathering into the Church men of every country, and kindred, and tongue, and nation, and people. And the apostles have told us how this provision is to be made available for the actual ingathering of Gentiles. They have put it on record that the prediction began to be fulfilled in their day by the simple preaching of the Gospel; and every thing that they said and did teaches us to expect that by the preaching of the Gospel that fulfilment will be carried on and completed. Many obstacles, indeed, have heretofore opposed, and still oppose the progress of Christ's kingdom. The Gospel has still to contend with the enmity of the carnal mind and the hostility of an ungodly world. But no enmity can be more bitter, and no hostility more fierce, than was that of Edom of old against the cause and

the Church of God. Yet even that was to be subdued. And why, then, should the Church become desponding or weary in the execution of her great mission,—that of being the instrument of converting the nations to the faith of the Gospel? And in regard to individuals, how little reason have believers to despair of the ultimate conversion of those to whom they have opportunities of presenting the truth, even though at present bitterly opposed to it! Such opposition, however violent, has been and may again be overcome. A divine power is pledged to accomplish it; for the promise is on this wise, "I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; .... that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord, that doeth this;" or, as the apostle expresses it, "that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things."

It appears, then, from this passage, as explained by the commentary of the apostle, that the tabernacle of David has again been restored, or raised up, and, moreover, that it has been enlarged so as to be capable of receiving under its shelter, and admitting to its privileges, "the residue of men," even all the Gentiles. And are we not ourselves witnesses of the faithfulness of this promise? We are of "the residue of men," as distinguished from the Jews,—we are Gentiles; unto us the door of the tabernacle of David has been thrown open. Like other Gentiles, we too were strangers and foreigners. Had the tabernacle of David been raised up merely to what it had been before, we should still have been excluded. But it has been enlarged as well as restored, so as to admit of all the Gentiles to come in; and if so, why not persevere with faith and patience, in labouring to persuade or compel men to come in, instead of dreaming, as some in these days seem to do, of another restoration, and another enlargement of David's tabernacle, as if it were still too small, or as if the Gospel of the grace of God, accompanied by the demonstration and power of the Holy Ghost, had lost the efficacy to work such wonders of conversion as were wrought in the days of the apostles, or such as have been wrought from age to age in this distant isle of the sea? Whatever mystery there may be in the slow progress of the Gospel,—and where is the thinking man

that has not felt awed in contemplating that mystery?—still it teaches one very plain and simple lesson,—the lesson of a patient and believing reliance on the word and mighty power of God, and a persevering, unwearied prosecution of the work of spreading the Gospel, which he has already so largely blessed, and still continues to bless. This trial of the faith and patience of the Church is, undoubtedly, one of the objects which the hitherto partial spread of the Gospel is fitted and designed to serve. Let us beware of defeating that object, in regard to our own spiritual improvement, by becoming weary of labours, because we do not see the fruit of them, and by indolently surrendering ourselves to the vague hope of some new dispensation, better fitted than the present, though it be the dispensation of the Spirit, for gathering together the dispersed of Judah, and bringing in the fulness of the Gentile nations.

I have already remarked, that we ourselves are one of many successive generations who can bear witness to the ample provision which has been made for extending the blessings of the Gospel to all the nations of the earth; for here, in this distant land,—distant far from the place where God did at first put his name, and where, also, the Gospel was first proclaimed,—even here all the blessings of that Gospel have been largely enjoyed by countless multitudes from age to age. But this consideration, as well as the statement in the passage before us, suggests a very solemn inquiry to each of us individually,—Have we really betaken ourselves to the tabernacle of David? We are, indeed, nominally in the Church. The community to which we belong is denominated a Christian community, and we have been baptised into the name of Jesus. We may be ready to conclude, therefore, that we come under the description of those Gentiles who are here represented as participating in the blessings of Messiah's kingdom,—even those who are called by the name of the Lord,—or upon whom the name of the Lord is called. And many, it is to be feared, do but too rashly conclude that such is their character and condition,—that, in virtue of their admission into the Church by baptism, and their subsequent profession of the Christian faith, the name of the Lord has been called upon them,—and that, therefore, they are participating in all the privileges and blessings which the Gospel was ever designed to

convey. This lamentable delusion, which, I fear, has been the undoing of many, is frequently and very fully exposed in Scripture. It was the delusion of those in Old Testament times, who thought themselves secure in the possession of mere outward ordinances, and who trusted "in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these." And it is the delusion against which our Lord has solemnly warned men in New Testament times, when he said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

A warning so solemn is surely fitted to suggest the inquiry, whether we may not be deceiving ourselves with a name to live while we are dead. But the same warning is given, and the same inquiry is suggested, by the language in the passage before us. The expression, "upon whom my name is called," is frequently used in Scripture, and implies a great deal more than merely an outward profession of trust on the part of those to whom that name was revealed or made known. Thus it is said of Israel, in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, "The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord,"—or, that the name of the Lord is called over thee; "and they shall be afraid of thee." Here it is plain that by their having the name of the Lord called or named over them, is meant not merely their avowing or professing themselves to be the people or worshippers of the Lord, but their being really his people, having his holiness imparted to them, being separated thereby from the abominations of the heathen, enjoying a sense of God's favour inwardly, as well as his protection outwardly, "keeping the commandments of the Lord their God, and walking in his ways." In like manner it will be found, that when it is said of individuals that the name of the Lord was called upon them, it

implied that God was present with them, or in them, of a truth, by his word and Spirit; as when Jeremiah said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name," or, "thy name is called upon me, O Lord God of hosts." And even in regard to inanimate things, naming the name of the Lord upon them implied the presence of the Lord there. Thus, when the Lord reproved Judah of old for profaning the temple, he said unto them, "Will ye burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house upon which my name is called, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, upon which my name is called, become a den of robbers in your eyes?" The great guilt here charged upon Judah was, that they profaned a place which was called the house of God, not merely because of the services that were performed and the sacrifices that were offered there, but because it was the house of God, the place which he did choose to put his name there, taking possession of it by a visible symbol of his presence, and making it the palace of the great King, the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory. Those, then, who have the name of the Lord called upon them, are those, and those only, with whom he is graciously present; and such alone are truly dwelling in the tabernacle of David. That tabernacle, as we have seen, has been thrown open to all, Gentiles as well as Jews, and all are invited to enter. But all have not entered who profess, or may seem to have done so. This is the doctrine of the Old Testament. It is the doctrine also of the New: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "Ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

LX.

THE BIRTH-PLACE OF CHRIST.

MICAH V. 2.

THIS prediction is a very remarkable one, whether considered in a historical or in a doctrinal point of view. That it refers to Christ is very certain; for it is repeatedly applied to his appearing, in the Gospel histories. But it is not merely a general prophecy concerning his appearing. It is an express prediction that he was to appear, or be born, at Bethlehem; for so it is interpreted by the evangelists. And considered simply as a prediction of that event, it was virtually a repetition of many other prophecies concerning Christ, and, in its fulfilment, furnished very striking illustrations of these prophecies. Bethlehem, it will be recollected, was the birth-place of David, where also he spent his early life in the humble occupation of keeping his father's sheep, until the Lord "took him from the sheep-folds," and "brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance." But David's exaltation to the throne of Israel was not the only or the chief honour that was conferred upon him. It was promised, and secured to him by solemn covenant, that Messiah was to be his son according to the flesh, and was to sit upon his throne; for the communication made to David was in these words, "Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." And, accordingly, David and Messiah are identified, or spoken of as one, everywhere in the psalms and in the prophets. Thus, in the

89th Psalm, "I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: with whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. . . . . I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. . . . . I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. . . . . His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven." And, in like manner, we find the prophets, hundreds of years after David had been gathered to his fathers, speaking of Messiah under the name of David, when setting forth the glory of New Testament or Gospel times. "Afterward," saith Hosea, "shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." So Jeremiah, "They shall serve the Lord their God, and David their King, whom I will raise up unto them." And in like manner Ezekiel repeatedly says, "Thus saith the Lord God, ... I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them." But neither was this the full amount of the honour that was put upon David. He was appointed to be an eminent type of Christ, first in his sufferings, and then in his exaltation. That he was so in his exaltation, we have already seen; for David's throne was called Messiah's throne, and as such was declared to "be established for ever," even "as the days of heaven." But David was a type of Christ in the persecution and sufferings, also, which he endured before he was exalted to the throne of Israel; for we find that the language in which he expressed his fears, and perplexities, and sorrows, is employed by Christ when he gave utterance to the feeling of desertion, the inconceivable agony, the great amazement, and the exceeding sorrowfulness of spirit under which he lay, when dealt with as the substitute of the guilty. When it was announced, then, in the simple language of the passage before us, "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel," the announcement brings vividly before us all that has elsewhere in Scripture been predicted or prefigured of Christ in the person of David; for

it tells us that as Bethlehem, poor and insignificant as it was in itself, had once given a king to Israel, so it was to do again.

But there is another class of prophecies respecting Christ in his relation to David, which are still more strikingly illustrated by this prediction. In consequence of the backsliding of David's successors in the throne, whereby the people at large were also drawn into great guiltiness and sin, many solemn threatenings were denounced against the kings of Judah, and severe judgments were from time to time executed upon them. It was at the same time, however, foretold that these threatenings and judgments would not arrest the downward course of these kings to ruin, and that the royal house of David would be brought to the very verge of utter extinction. Many prophecies to this effect might be quoted. But the most emphatic and expressive of them are those in which Messiah is foretold as the branch of a vine, that was to be strong after the vine itself had been almost burned up and consumed, "a righteous Branch," that was to be raised up unto David, "a rod," or shoot, "out of the stem of Jesse," and a branch growing out of his roots,—even "a tender plant," and "a root out of a dry ground." All these expressions did most significantly intimate to what a low estate the royal house of David was to be reduced, at the time that Messiah appeared as the heir of David's throne. And what a striking commentary on all these prophecies is furnished by the simple fact, that Christ, instead of being born in Jerusalem, the acknowledged son and successor of David, had his birth-place, like David himself, in Bethlehem, and especially when we take into account the circumstances in which he was born there, as related by the evangelist Luke! He tells us that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was led by circumstances over which she had no control to sojourn at Bethlehem; "and so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

I have referred to the circumstances which led to Messiah being born at Bethlehem, and have observed that over these Mary, the mother of Jesus, had no control. But it may not be unprofitable to advert a little more particularly to these circum-

stances, as furnishing a very remarkable illustration of the supremacy and all-directing providence of God. Previously to the time of which we are speaking, the land of Judea had been brought into subjection by the Romans, and, in fact, was about to be reduced to the condition of a mere province of the Roman empire. In this state of things, "it came to pass," says the evangelist, "that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world,"—that is, all the Roman empire,—"should be taxed;" or rather, should be enrolled, with the view of being taxed. "And all went to be taxed," or enrolled, "every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." Now, this is a very simple narrative, relating events very natural in themselves, and such, we might suppose, as could be very easily and satisfactorily accounted for, without recognising any special manifestation of the overruling providence of God. We can readily conceive how Joseph and Mary might be obliged, in obedience to a general decree of the Roman government, from which none of its subjects would be exempted, to undertake a journey which they would never otherwise have thought of undertaking; and we can also, without any difficulty, conceive, that when they arrived at Bethlehem, they might be obliged to take up their residence in a stable, in consequence of the crowds that had already arrived there on the same errand with themselves. But when we find that the concurrence of these various circumstances brought about the literal fulfilment of the prediction in the verse before us,—a prediction delivered seven hundred years before; and when we find, moreover, that this literal fulfilment of one prophecy furnishes also, as we have seen, the clearest and most interesting illustrations of many other prophecies concerning Christ as a shoot from the decayed tree of the house of David,—can we fail to contemplate the whole series of the events referred to with profound reverence

and admiration? When we reflect on even a few of the circumstances connected with and apparently necessary for the fulfilment of this prediction; for example, the subjugation of the land of Judea to the power of the Romans, the decree of the Roman emperor for taxing all the provinces and dependencies of the empire, the particular mode of carrying that decree into effect, by requiring all to repair to the city to which they originally belonged, and the precise period at which it came to be executed at Bethlehem;—when we reflect, I say, on this combination of circumstances, we must see, throughout the whole, the hand of Him who worketh all his pleasure in heaven above and in the earth beneath. The prediction, indeed, might have been fulfilled without the concurrence of such events, or the co-operation of such secondary agents as I have referred to; for the angel who at first appeared to Mary might have been commissioned to instruct her to repair to Bethlehem, and there to give birth to the Saviour of the world. But no such instruction was given, because it was not necessary, and because, if it had been given, we should have wanted one of the most striking examples on record of the sovereignty of God in rendering even sinners themselves the unconscious ministers of his pleasure, the instruments of executing his purposes. The decree of the Roman emperor was a voluntary act on his part, and the manner of carrying it into effect was dictated by worldly wisdom and policy.

But there was One higher than the sovereign of Rome who had also purposes to accomplish, and who did accomplish them, by directing and overruling at pleasure the counsels and operations of earthly rulers. The birth of an infant in a stable at Bethlehem was an event which, considered in itself, the world might regard as of little moment. And yet it was to the accomplishment of this event that God, in his unsearchable wisdom and almighty power, directed the revolutions of ages, and the plans and deliberations of the mightiest monarchs. It is from such examples as the subject before us furnishes, that we receive the deepest as well as the most vivid impressions of the providence of God, as exercising a most holy, wise, and powerful control over all his creatures and over all their actions. The general truth that God does so govern the world, though we know and believe it, too often fails, I fear, to awaken more than a very

vague idea of his marvellous power and wisdom, or of his unchangeable faithfulness and truth. But when we contemplate the fulfilment of what he had promised or foretold, and see that fulfilment to be the result of the revolutions of successive ages, and of the co-operation of multitudes of unconscious agents, the hand of God becomes, as it were, palpable to our senses, and the contemplation is fitted to awaken feelings of the deepest reverence and admiration. And while we dwell with wonder and awe on the marvellous manifestation of wisdom, power, and faithfulness presented to us in the fulfilment of this promise, how should it also minister to our consolation, and encouragement, and feeling of security, to reflect that the same wisdom and power are still ceaselessly exercised in the government of the world,—that God is providing for the fulfilment of every promise which he has given to the Church, as faithfully and as certainly as he did for the accomplishment of what the prophet here foretold,—and that every event which befalls every individual of Christ's people is determined by Him "which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working."

We have already seen that the birth of Christ at Bethlehem was not only the literal fulfilment of the prediction in the passage under consideration, but a most interesting illustration also of many other prophecies concerning him as the son of David, and the heir of David's throne. But that event is full of interest also in another point of view. It is fitted to minister largely to the comfort and encouragement of the humble, the contrite, and downcast in spirit,—those who have a very deep sense of their own guiltiness and sin, and very profound apprehensions of the majesty and glory of God. To such persons it will always be, more or less, a revival and refreshment of spirit to contemplate the depth of humiliation to which Christ descended, when he stooped to become a weak and helpless infant, dependent, as other infants are, on a mother's care and tenderness. In regard to Christ himself, indeed, the circumstances in which he appeared on the earth could not greatly add to the humiliation which he condescended to undergo; for if the Eternal Word, the Creator of all things, the second person of the Godhead, was to become incarnate at all, it was such a marvellous humiliation, such an act of infinite condescension, as could not be materially affected

by the condition and circumstances in which he might appear, whether he should have his birth-place in the hall of princes, the universally recognised heir to the most exalted throne on earth, or whether he should be born of a mean woman in a stable, and laid in a manger. But in reference to his people, the manner and circumstances of his appearing were of unspeakable importance. Many, I am persuaded, would feel that if he had never appeared in a lowlier or more humble condition than that of a mighty sovereign, literally sitting on the throne of David, they would not have realised his tenderness, and compassion, and pity as they now do, when they contemplate him not only as a feeble and helpless infant, but as exposed to all the privations which fall to the lot of the poorest and most humble. That he should take their nature, and condescend to be born in any condition,—whether humble and obscure, or more honourable and exalted,—and that he should grow up from infancy to manhood, is a consideration fitted to call forth the affection and gratitude of his people to him, and to give them the assurance of his sympathy for them under all those trials in which he did himself participate. But the farther consideration, that it was in an humble and lowly condition that he condescended to be placed, is fitted to convey a still deeper impression of the reality of his sympathy and compassion under the trials and afflictions to which they are here liable.

It might be said, perhaps, that they do not need this consideration, for the Scriptures abound with express assurances that the Saviour does so sympathise with his suffering and sorrowing people. It is said of him in reference to the Old Testament Church, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them: and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." And in the New Testament, the same gracious truth is repeatedly and very expressly set forth. "For it became him," says the apostle, "for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. . . . . Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself

likewise took part of the same..... For verily he took not hold of angels; but he took hold of the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." And, again, we find the same apostle saying, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

These are, indeed, very plain and very precious declarations; and where is the believer who has not felt his hope revived, and his spirit refreshed, and his heart re-assured before God while he read and pondered them? And yet, does not the experience of believers testify that there are times when, in order to have a vivid idea of the reality of this divine compassion and tenderness, which the Scriptures ascribe to the Saviour, they feel it needful devoutly to meditate on him as he appeared on earth, subject to all the sinless infirmities of human nature, passing, as they themselves have passed, through every stage of life from infancy to manhood, enduring, as they never endured, the manifold ills of this weary world, and feeling, far more acutely than they ever felt, the sorrows and sufferings of humanity, sin only excepted. They do require thus to think of Christ; for when they contemplate him as the Lord of glory, infinitely exalted above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and possessing in himself all the majesty and glory of the Godhead, they may have difficulty in conceiving that he does really sympathise with them, or can be touched with a feeling of their infirmities; and thus the sentiment awakened in their minds may be that of solemn awe rather than affectionate confidence. But when, in devout meditation, they conceive themselves looking upon Christ in the days of his flesh, seeing the works of might and of mercy which he wrought, and hearing the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; when, in imagination, they accompany him as he

journeyed through Judea, preaching glad tidings to the meek, and binding up the broken-hearted; and above all, perhaps, when they conceive themselves standing by the manger in Bethlehem, and reflect that the infant who slept there is he who now sits on his throne of glory, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; oh, how vividly may they not realise the precious truth that he is indeed touched with a feeling of their infirmities, and that they may come boldly unto a throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need!

But while this prediction, as now fulfilled, does thus provide largely for the consolation of the humble and contrite in heart, by the view which it unfolds of the Saviour's humiliation, it ministers also to their encouragement, by the assurance which it gives them that Christ is not more ready to pity than he is able and willing to help them: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." This is a very brief description of Christ's victory and exaltation, and it is expressed in very general terms. But it is, at the same time, very comprehensive and full of meaning. There is obviously a reference to David in it; and it is, therefore, a virtual declaration that all the great things which David did, and all the blessings which he secured for Israel, were but typical of the infinitely greater and more glorious things which Messiah was to accomplish. And David was honoured both to suffer and to do a great deal for Israel; for, as we have already seen, he was to be a type of Christ in his conflict, as well as in his triumph. And, accordingly, after being anointed to be the future king of Israel, while yet an humble and obscure individual in the town of Bethlehem, he had to pass through years of privation and bitter persecution before he was placed on the throne, and even then had many a severe conflict to undergo before his kingdom was established. But it was established. The Lord was with him whithersoever he went, and cut off all his enemies out of his sight, and made him a great name, like unto the name of the great men that were in the earth: "And the fame of David went out into all lands; and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all." Nor were the results of David's achievements fully manifested in his own lifetime. It was in Solomon's days

that the kingdom of Israel reached its highest point of prosperity, and peace, and honour, when Solomon "had dominion over all the kings on this side the river;" and "had peace on all sides round about him; and Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beersheba." But it was to the conquests which David was honoured to achieve that all this prosperity might be traced; and it is only when it is all included that David becomes an adequate type of Him who was to come forth out of Bethlehem to be ruler in Israel. He, too, like David, passed through years of privation and bitter persecution,—nay, through death itself. But he is now upon his throne,—not a temporal throne, ruling over the literal Israel,—but on a heavenly throne, ruling over his Church, the spiritual Israel, achieving victories and procuring blessings on their behalf, which were but faintly shadowed forth in all that David did on behalf of Israel. Messiah, indeed, has not gathered his Church together, and placed them, as Israel were, beyond the reach of their enemies, by separating them outwardly from these enemies, and putting the fear of his people and the dread of them on all those that are round about or opposed to them. But he does not need thus outwardly to gather together his people into one community, and to hedge them about, in order that they may participate in the benefits and blessings of his kingdom. He does not need to dwell personally on the earth, and to occupy the temporal throne of David, in order to manifest himself to his people, and to give them the assurance of his presence and protection. However widely they may be scattered, they never can be beyond the limits of his dominion; for he is King of nations, as well as King in Zion: and though his believing people are, in a peculiar sense, the subjects of his kingdom, and alone his willing subjects, and partakers of the spiritual and eternal blessings of that kingdom, yet he is invested with sovereign authority over all, and with power to restrain, and conquer, and to subdue at his pleasure.

His people, therefore, are as really under his immediate rule, and share as unceasingly in his superintending and protecting power, as if they formed outwardly a separate kingdom, and enjoyed a visible manifestation of his presence. And the experience of his people will testify, what they might have assuredly

concluded beforehand, that great and important purposes are served by that ordination whereby the Church and the world are mingled, instead of being outwardly and visibly separated. The temptations, and trials, and afflictions which may arise to the people of God out of such a state of things, form a part of that discipline whereby they are trained in the spiritual life,—occasions being thereby afforded for the exercise of all the graces and the practice of all the virtues of the Christian character. Even in regard to the temptations of the world, by which the people of God may be overcome, and concerning which they may be disposed to think that, but for such temptations, they would this day have had less sin to confess and lament, it is by no means certain that they are right in this conclusion, and that without these temptations they would not have been guiltier than they are. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," and might have made a stronger and more dangerous temptation of any thing. And with regard to the trials and afflictions which may come upon them from the faithlessness, or injustice, or hostility of the world, these are all needful. Believers may find it difficult at times to admit this. They may not see that for any special reason they did stand in need of such a trial; and they may be ready to conclude that so far from doing them any good, it serves only to awaken irritation, fretfulness, and impatience. But have they forgotten that Christ is upon his throne, ruling over and in his people Israel? Or do they not believe that every individual of them is watched over and cared for with a special view to their spiritual and eternal well-being? And if so, must they not believe that if they are chastened, it is for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holiness? And if their own best interests will not reconcile them to his dispensations, let them think of what he suffered for them. He knew that they could not, consistently with the plans of divine wisdom, be brought to his heavenly kingdom otherwise than through trial and tribulation; and to reconcile them to this ordination, he did himself become a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, not only to give them an example of patient suffering, but that he might give them the assurance of his compassion and sympathy in all that they should suffer. Let them think, then, of what he endured between the

manger in Bethlehem and the cross on Calvary; and let them ask themselves whether they can doubt that it is in love and faithfulness that he afflicts them.

This passage, then, sets forth Christ in the depth of his humiliation, as an helpless infant in the lowliest condition; and in the glory of his exaltation, as sitting on the throne of his father David, to reign over the house of Jacob for ever. But, in the concluding clause, there is presented a still more sublime view of the Saviour's character: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," or, "from the days of eternity." This last clause does, of course, very plainly refer to Christ's pre-existent state,—or the state in which he was before he assumed our nature, and was born into the world. And the clause does as plainly assert that this pre-existent state was from everlasting, or, in other words, that Christ was from eternity, and therefore God. But the language employed to express this truth is remarkable, and seems to imply something more than simply that the glorious person here foretold was a divine person. It is said of him that his goings forth were from everlasting. The expression, "goings forth," is essentially the same with that of "coming forth" in the preceding clause; and suggests, therefore, that a contrast was intended between Christ's being born in Bethlehem, and his former or pre-existent state. And if so, then we have here, as we have elsewhere, both in the Old and in the New Testaments, the sublime and mysterious doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship, or, as it is usually expressed, his being eternally begotten of the Father. The prophet's announcement, then, is to this effect, that he who came forth from Bethlehem, born of an humble woman, in the lowliest circumstances, was he who from eternity came forth from God the Father, and was thus of the same nature and essence. And the purpose of this announcement was not merely to assert Christ's divinity. That itself was, no doubt, of unspeakable importance, and especially to the Old Testament Church. For, in the first place, it guarded them against the idea, which they might otherwise have entertained, that the person here foretold as coming out of Bethlehem was merely a natural de-

scendant of David, who, with David's skill and prowess, should work out deliverances for Israel similar to those which David had wrought out. And, secondly, it was a plain declaration to them that Messiah and the Son of God were the same person; for it appears that when Christ came, the Jews had come to believe that Messiah was to be merely a prophet,—the greatest, perhaps, of all the prophets,—but still a prophet, and a mere man. They knew the doctrine of the Trinity, and understood what was meant by the Son of God; but they did not believe that the Son of God was to be Messiah. And, accordingly, we find that multitudes who were ready to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ or Messiah, were filled even to phrensy with rage and indignation when he declared himself to be the Son of God.

But in so thinking and acting, they misunderstood or disbelieved the testimony of the prophet. Provision was here made, if they would have availed themselves of it, to guard them against that fatal error. But the announcement is not less important or less instructive to the Church now. It is so simply as declaring the divinity of Christ; for the Church now needs, as much as the Church at any time ever did, to be assured that her Saviour is God. But this passage, in connection with other Scriptures, tells us a great deal more than this. It declares that the Saviour is the Son of God, not only equal to and of the same substance or essence with God, but as standing to him in the relation of a son to a father; for he is the eternal and only begotten Son of God. How this relation can subsist from all eternity, we may not be able, and we are not able to explain. But one thing we know, and can in some measure understand, that if there be such a relation, then there must be the love or affection that springs from that relation, namely, the love of a father for a son, and of a son for a father; and in the case of the persons in the Godhead, that love must subsist in perfect purity and infinite fulness. And what a profound view does this consideration open up of the love of both for poor perishing sinners,—of the Father in giving up his Son for them; and of the Son in leaving the bosom of the Father to become incarnate, and suffer, and die! And how seasonably and appropriately is this view of Christ's relation to the Father introduced, in connection with his birth as the man Jesus Christ! When we read the address of the aged

Simeon to Mary in the temple, as she presented her first-born unto the Lord, in which he said, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also);" and when we contemplate the fulfilment of this prediction in the crucifixion of Jesus, when his mother, we are told, stood by,—can we fail deeply to sympathise in all the anxiety, and perplexity, and anguish of spirit which she endured on his account, from the day that she brought him forth in the stable at Bethlehem, till the hour that she saw him expire on the cross on Calvary? And what, then, should be our thoughts of that infinitely more profound love of which Christ was the object,—even the love of the Father, who, nevertheless, in love and compassion for sinners, did not withhold or spare him? I dare not venture on any farther illustration of the idea suggested by this passage. And it is not necessary. Our Lord himself has exhausted the subject in a single sentence: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

LXI.

THE GLORY OF THE LATTER HOUSE.

HAG. AI II. 9.

In the preceding chapter, we find the prophet addressing his brethren in the language of severe rebuke; and the cause of that rebuke is there also very distinctly stated. They had returned to their own land about sixteen years before, being set free by the decree of Cyrus, after seventy years' captivity in Babylon, according to the word of the Lord, by the mouth of the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah; and in the second year after their coming to Jerusalem, they proceeded to lay the foundation of the temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. In entering on this undertaking, they had much to discourage them. Their numbers did not far exceed forty thousand; and though they left Babylon with the full permission and countenance of Cyrus, and carried with them, moreover, a goodly portion of the holy vessels of the first temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away, yet they were but an handful in point of numbers, and, in worldly circumstances, poor and destitute compared even with the condition of their fathers when they left Egypt, their house of bondage, and spoiled the Egyptians; and how much more feeble and destitute as compared with what Israel was in the time of Solomon, when the first temple was built! There were, moreover, among them "many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house;" and when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, they

wept with a loud voice, because, as compared with the first house, it was in their eyes as nothing. All this was discouraging enough. Still, notwithstanding it all, they appeared to have entered vigorously on their work. While many of the ancient men wept with a loud voice, many also shouted aloud for joy. The promise of God had proved so faithful, and the manner of his interposing to fulfil the promise was so wonderful, that all the godly among them must have felt the obligation under which they were laid to undertake and carry on the work of rebuilding the house of the Lord. Even the ancient men, who wept because of its comparative meanness, must have been rejoicing in the great things which God had done for them in turning again their captivity, and could not be without the hope that he had still greater things in reserve for them. It appears, accordingly, that they did enter on their undertaking with some good measure of zeal and activity. The people of the land, the descendants of the heathen nations, whom the king of Assyria planted there, in the room of Israel whom he carried into captivity, proffered their aid to the restored captive Jews in rebuilding the temple,—professing to worship the true God as they did. But "Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel," rejected the proposal, saying, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build an house unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us."

They thus manifested a very wholesome jealousy of any thing like an alliance with the heathen,—the sin to which their fathers had been so prone,—and a holy determination to look to God alone for help. But their faith was soon subjected to a severe trial. The people of the land, as might be expected, became their bitter enemies, and, after many efforts to weaken their hands, succeeded in awakening the jealousy of the court of Persia against them, and in at last procuring a decree of the king that the building of the house of God should cease; and it ceased, accordingly, unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia, being about fifteen years from the time that the foundation of the house was laid. We cannot doubt that this interruption would, in the first instance, be a very painful disappointment, at least to the godly among them; nor can we wonder that,

when long continued, it should generate a feeling of hopelessness. But it appears that this hopelessness did, in time, become indifference. They ceased to mourn over the waste and desolate condition of the house of God, and their own worldly convenience and comfort became the chief subject of their concern; so that when all obstructions were removed, and Darius gave them not only permission but great encouragement to proceed with the building of the temple, they manifested no disposition to resume the work. It was on this account that Haggai was commissioned to reprove them; and he did so in very plain and very severe language: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? . . . . . Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit."

Such, it appears, was the first message with which Haggai was charged to his restored brethren of Judah, as recorded at the beginning of the first chapter. But we learn, from the concluding part of the same chapter, that the prophet's rebuke was not in vain. Too often had it been the lot of the prophets who preceded him to incur the bitterest resentment of those whom they affectionately sought to benefit, and thus to be the innocent occasion of aggravating the guilt of those whom they laboured to reclaim and bring to repentance. Haggai might have had reason to fear that such also would be his lot. But his message was accompanied with a divine power. It served not to irritate, but to humble; for "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." But it appears that with the revival of their zeal for the restoration of the house of God, there was revived also in their minds the painful feeling, that even when finished, it would be as nothing compared with the former house. The pain which they felt did not arise from a grudging spirit,—an unwillingness to make sacrifices for finishing the work. Once they might have felt, and in fact did feel so, when their

own worldly comforts formed the chief or the only subject of their concern. But it was not so after the prophet's message had taken effect upon them. The subject of their regret was, that they had not the means of making the house of God what they would wish it to be, and what they thought it was for the honour of God that it should be. The feeling, therefore, was the effect of their quickened zeal for the glory of God ; but it was, at the same time, a discouraging feeling, which might in time lead them to relax their efforts, and so beget the very hopelessness which had formerly ended in lukewarmness and indifference. While, therefore, they still required to be warned, they needed, also, to be comforted and encouraged. And so they were very abundantly. The moment they manifested any thing like a penitent sense of their former indifference and declension, and a desire to resume the work of building the house of God, the prophet was instructed to address them in language the most animating and encouraging. He admitted that the house that they were building could not, indeed, bear a comparison with the former house, and that if they looked only to the outward appearance, even after having done all that they could do to beautify and adorn it, they might have reason to be greatly discouraged : "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory ? and how do you see it now ? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing ?" But he assured them that the very meanness which they deplored, and by which they were so much discouraged, would ultimately serve to demonstrate more clearly the power and faithfulness of God, in not only enabling them to build the house in spite of all opposition, but in rendering it more glorious than the former had ever been : "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord ; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest ; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work : for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts : according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you : fear ye not."

Not only was a pledge thus given them that they would bring the work in which they were engaged to a successful issue, but by the reference to the deliverance of their fathers from Egypt, they were assured that God would one day fulfil every good word

which his mouth had spoken concerning Israel. For a long time that word might appear to have failed or to have been forgotten. Instead of standing high, they had been brought very low among the nations. Through many successive generations, they had been wasted by the inroads of the heathen into their land. They had at last been carried into captivity for the long period of seventy years; and though again restored to the land of their fathers, they were, in the estimation of those around them, a miserable handful of despised captives still, being altogether in the power and at the mercy of the sovereign who had professedly set them free. But they were assured that, despised as they themselves might be, and mean as was the house which they builded, they were engaged in a work to which ultimately all nations would do honour: "For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come,"—or, as some of the best commentators render it, "all nations with their riches or best things shall come,"—"and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." Of course, the then existing generation of the Jews could not witness the full accomplishment of this prediction; for it is still only in progress towards fulfilment. But here, as everywhere else in Scripture, it is assumed or taken for granted in regard to God's true people, that the prospect of the future glory of the Church, however distant, would minister consolation to them under present suffering and depression; as Abraham saw the day of Christ and was glad, though it was far off,—and as David rejoiced because God had spoken good of his house for a long while to come. Moreover, the certain prospect of great prosperity to the Church, at a future though distant period, was a pledge to God's people that he had not forsaken them,—that he would be with them through all the interval that might elapse between the giving of the promise and the fulfilment of it,—and that they would be honoured in the meantime in being instrumental in forwarding the Lord's work. Such, obviously, was the consolation which the prediction before us was designed and fitted to impart to the restored Jews at Jerusalem. And though the promised glory of the Church was still very

distant, yet a little while only had to elapse till the beginning, at least, of the shaking among the nations was to be manifested; for even that generation of the Jews might witness the commencement of those great revolutions in the mighty empires of the world which were more particularly foretold by Daniel, and which, like every other revolution, God overruled for the accomplishment of his purposes regarding the Church. They were thus to have visible proofs, in the events that were passing around them, of the sovereignty and faithfulness of God, and, therefore, successive pledges also of the due fulfilment of the promise, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."

To see the full import of these words, they must be viewed, of course, in connection with the whole prophecy of which they form a part. And when so viewed, it will be found that they do not refer exclusively, or even mainly, to what the second temple was ever to become, as a temple or house, in regard to ornament and splendour. It was obviously a gracious ordination of God that the second temple should not be equal to the first in grandeur and beauty. The Jews needed, as their whole history testifies, to have their affections withdrawn from objects of sense, in order to be trained to the right appreciation and enjoyment of what was spiritual. "If, then," as has been well observed, "the second temple had been equally magnificent with the former, and if the kingdom had become such as it had been, the Jews would have acquiesced in these outward pomps; so that Christ would have been despised, and God's spiritual favour would have been esteemed as nothing. Since, then, they were so bent on earthly happiness, it was necessary for them to be awakened; and the Lord had regard to their weakness, by not allowing a splendid temple to be built." Herod, indeed, did at a late period greatly enlarge, and beautify, and adorn the second temple, and avowedly with the view of making it equal, if not superior, to the first. But he did so without regard to God's glory, and therefore without God's approbation. He profanely attempted to fulfil the prediction of Haggai, for the very purpose of satisfying the Jews with external show and form, that they might not look for a higher, a spiritual fulfilment of the pro-

phecy. "His building of the temple," as an able commentator has remarked, "proceeded on the same principle as his murder of the children in Bethlehem. He wished to hinder the coming of the kingdom of God." And he succeeded largely in contributing to render the people blind to that kingdom when it did come. The newly adorned temple was the object of their idolatrous admiration, to the extinction of every spiritual affection or desire. But, indeed, they had been gradually sinking into that state before Herod repaired the temple, so that, to use the language of the commentator formerly referred to, "when God suffered so splendid a temple to be erected, he manifested his displeasure against the Jews, rather than his favour for them. Though Herod spent great treasures on that building, he yet profaned rather than adorned the temple. It was Satan who attempted to deceive by such impostures and crafts, that he might draw away the minds of the godly from the beauty of the spiritual temple." It was not, then, to the temple merely, as a temple or house, that this passage refers exclusively, or even mainly. But there was one event connected with it, to which I cannot help thinking it did especially refer, and by which the glory of the second house was greater than of the former, not only as it was seen by some of the ancient men among the restored Jews immediately before the captivity, but even as it appeared in all its magnificence and beauty on the day of its dedication by Solomon, when the Lord, by a visible symbol of his presence, took possession of it as his dwelling-place, and when the priests could not stand to minister, because the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God. It was this visible symbol of God's presence that constituted the true glory of the first temple, and the want of which in the second did in an especial manner mark its inferiority. But this defect was more than supplied when the Lord came suddenly to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant,—God manifest in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ. Nothing, indeed, appeared in him to gratify the eye of sense; and when men saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him. But he was, notwithstanding, the Eternal Word incarnate, the Creator, and heir of all things, the brightness of the Father's glory, and "the express image of his person." And if Solomon was filled with holy awe by the thought

that God should condescend to take up his abode in the house which he had built, though only by a symbol of his presence, how much more profound must have been his reverential feeling, if he could have seen or clearly conceived of the Eternal Son of God in human nature coming to his temple! and how much greater reason would he have had to exclaim, "Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth!"

The lowliness, indeed, in which Christ appeared, presented a striking contrast to the external show and splendour by which the Jews were captivated, and which, in regard to most of them, had extinguished in their minds not only all relish for, but all conception of the spiritual worship of God. They despised, therefore, and rejected him. But had they apprehended his character, had they seen who and what he was, how would his very lowliness have overwhelmed them with shame for their perversion of Scripture prophecy concerning him, and with dismay at the thought that they had converted the ordinances of God into a system of splendid hypocrisy! They looked, as Herod wished them to do, to their renovated temple as the fulfilment of the prediction, in so far as concerned the glory of the second house; and they cherished the hope that the promise of peace contained in the same prediction would soon be fulfilled also in their being delivered from the yoke of the Romans, restored to their worldly prosperity and privileges, and exalted to a state of superiority to the nations around them. Little did they think that both these promises were fulfilled in him whom from the first they lightly esteemed, and whom at last they crucified and slew. Yet so it was; for while his personal appearance was a manifestation of the divine glory, of which the glory of the first temple was but a type, he did also in that place give peace.

There he exhibited the ground of a sinner's reconciliation with God as it had never before been exhibited, when he declared himself to be the fountain of living water. There he imparted peace to the conscience of those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel, by the gracious invitations which he addressed to them, and by the exceeding great and precious promises with which these invitations were accompanied. And thence were the glad tidings of peace and pardon through his blood sent forth to be proclaimed among all nations, agreeably to another Scripture

prophecy: "The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

There was thus in the personal appearance of Christ in the temple a literal fulfilment of the prediction, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." But even that event, glorious as it was, did not exhaust the prophecy. It is plain, from the whole tenor of God's subsequent dealings with the Jews, that when all the nations are represented as coming with their riches, it was not to beautify and adorn the material house which the restored captives were then in the act of building; and in the humble condition in which Christ appeared, there was the clearest proof that such was not the meaning of the prophecy. Under the old dispensation, the kingdom of Israel constituted the visible Church, and the temple was the dwelling-place of the Lord in the midst of her. Thither, therefore, went up the tribes of Israel, and such of the heathen as were from time to time converted to the true religion, and there they offered sacrifices and gifts to God out of their substance. But it was not the purpose of Christ's coming either to restore again the kingdom to Israel, or to make the material temple what it was before. He came to establish a spiritual kingdom; and, therefore, prophecies relating to New Testament times must be understood spiritually, though expressed in the language usually employed under the old dispensation. Even under that dispensation, true believers, earnest godly men, would understand such a prophecy as that before us mainly in a spiritual sense; for when they were told that all nations should be shaken, and that all nations would come to the temple with their silver and their gold, and that the Lord would fill his house with glory, they would immediately anticipate, from such a prediction, a very prosperous time for the Church by the spread of the true religion. No doubt, this would be associated in their minds with

the literal fulfilment of the promise,—the actual accumulation of gold, and silver, and precious offerings, in the house of God. But the view of the promise on which they would chiefly dwell, and in which they would especially rejoice, was as a promise that, at the time foretold, there would be a large diffusion of real vital godliness throughout the kingdom of Judah, and that multitudes of the heathen would turn from dumb idols, and acknowledge and worship the God of Israel as the only living and true God. Now, it was the obvious design, as well as the tendency, of all God's dealings with the Jews, especially in their being prevented from building a gorgeous temple, to draw away their thoughts and their desires from the mere outward and material,—the silver and the gold,—and to direct them to the spiritual, that they might look for the fulfilment of the prediction in the great increase and extension of the true spiritual Church of God; and this design, as we have seen, was at once confirmed and illustrated by the condition in which Messiah appeared.

The main subject of the prophecy, then, is the commencement, progress, and final establishment of the kingdom of God under the New Testament or Gospel dispensation. And so the apostle interprets it, in the 12th chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, where he introduces the prophecy, for the purpose of warning the Hebrews of the greater and more aggravated guilt which they would incur by refusing to hear God speaking in the Gospel, or new dispensation, as compared with the guilt of those who refused to hear him when speaking in the law, or old dispensation: "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." The apostle has thus plainly taught that the whole prophecy, of which the passage under consideration forms a part, refers to the kingdom

of God under the New Testament dispensation, and declares that of all things on the earth, that kingdom is the only thing that cannot be shaken or removed. Nay, he has declared that, for the very purpose of establishing this kingdom, all other things have been or will be shaken and removed, in so far as it is needful, or as they stand in the way of that establishment. And, indeed, all this might be inferred from the words of the prophet himself. When he speaks of the shaking of the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and all nations, he represents this shaking as taking place for the very purpose of filling the Lord's house with glory,—that is, of gathering in his redeemed people, and building them into a Church, or spiritual temple, wherein Christ himself, the true Shechinah, or glory, may dwell.

This shaking began, as we have already seen, very soon after the prediction was uttered, in the revolutions which overtook one mighty empire after another; and though we are not able to trace in these successive revolutions the steps by which the purpose of God was carried forward, yet it were not difficult to show that, at the time of Christ's appearing, the state of the world, which was the result of all these changes, was such as to furnish a very clear manifestation of the grace and wisdom of God in determining that Messiah's advent should take place when the world was in that condition. Preparation being thus made by the shaking of the earth for Messiah's coming, his actual appearing was accompanied by a mightier shaking still; for did not the Lord in very deed rend the heavens and come down, and fill the temple with his glory? Men, indeed, did not see this glory. Christ came to his own, and even his own received him not. They persecuted and put him to death; and they flattered themselves that he would be heard of no more. But when he sent forth his apostles to preach the Gospel, there was another, and, to many, a very terrible shaking. Ungodly men, rulers and subjects, took the alarm, setting themselves against the Lord and against his anointed, and they laboured to crush a cause which they both feared and hated. But the cause prospered. There was a spiritual shaking, whereby the Gospel came to men, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, so that multitudes in every nation were added unto the Church,

giving themselves, with their gold and their silver also, unto the Lord, that he might be glorified. And having these recorded facts, as well as a sure word of prophecy, already so largely fulfilled, can we doubt that all the shakings among the nations, complicated and perplexing as they may appear to us, are and will be directed so as to be subservient to the accomplishment of God's purposes concerning his Church; and that not only in spite of these, but by their undesigned help, "the kingdoms of this world" will "become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ?"

It may be very profitable to us frequently to contemplate the view which is here, and, indeed, everywhere in Scripture, presented of the Church of Christ, as that on whose account all events are determined, and all existing things ordered and disposed of. There is thus no place of rest or of safety for us if we are not in the Church,—that is, united to Christ as members of his body. All things, whatever they be, that stand in the way of his purposes regarding the Church, must ultimately be removed. But if we are not of the Church, we are not merely in the way of his plans,—we are opposed to them, and belong to the kingdom of the wicked one,—that kingdom which must not only be removed, but destroyed,—destroyed with an everlasting destruction. For a season, the subjects of that kingdom may be not only endured, but permitted to enjoy much seeming comfort; for Satan's kingdom is often, to all appearance, very flourishing. But it does not,—it cannot last. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." Death terminates, in the case of every individual, all the happiness which the deluded subjects of that kingdom can ever appear to enjoy. And can any of us, then, contentedly leave it a doubtful question whether God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son?" And if we have attained to good hope of being ourselves brought into the kingdom of grace, so as to have some lively concern for others being brought into it, as we assuredly will have if we are in it, then the view here presented to us of the place which the Church occupies in the plans and purposes of God may serve greatly to comfort and encourage us. There is now, as there always has

been, much in the state of the world that is calculated to depress the hopes of God's people in regard to the spread of the Gospel, the real conversion of any large portion of the nations unto God; and when they dwell on the idolatry of the immense masses of people who never heard the truth, and the multitudes who have heard it, but who openly deride it, or pay it the mock homage of a cold and formal acknowledgment, they may be ready to despond as to the final triumph of the Gospel in a world so hopelessly corrupt. And when, besides all this, they consider the active opposition that the truth has to encounter even in those countries where it is in some form professedly believed,—how the dictates of worldly policy, or the hopes of worldly gain, or the gratification of worldly desires, may often succeed in establishing practices altogether opposed to the revealed will of God, and therefore ruinous to the souls of men,—they may be disposed to conclude that their weak and humble efforts can avail nothing in a conflict with such opposition,—and they may, in consequence, cease from making these efforts. But is there not enough to revive their hope, and to re-awaken their energies, in the view here given of God's care for his Church? They are assured that he has overruled, and that he will continue to overrule, the changes and events of many successive ages, and make it appear at last that they were all rendered subservient to the final establishment of Christ's kingdom. And if they believe this, then they must also believe that the smallest and apparently most insignificant event is under the same control as the mightiest revolution that takes place among the nations of the earth. And surely He who thus presides over all, and who renders the most powerful efforts of enemies the means of executing his purposes, can with equal facility render the feeblest efforts of the friends of his cause productive of good far beyond what they could estimate or conceive. Let them not, then, be cast down, or become weary in any good work. He who marked with approbation the poor widow's mite will not overlook any service of theirs, however small, if only rendered in faith and love; and in due time they shall reap abundantly, if they faint not.

LXII.

CHRIST "THE ANGEL OF THE LORD."

ZECHARIAH I. 7–15.

THE first divine communication which Zechariah was commissioned to make to his brethren, the Jews who had returned from captivity, is contained in the first six verses of this chapter, and was a communication of reproof and warning. But, in about three months after, it was followed by another, commencing with the passage before us, and extending to the middle of the 6th chapter. The object of this second communication was to comfort and encourage the Jews. It consists of a vision,—or rather, a series of visions,—which were vouchsafed to the prophet, and in which God was pleased to make known to him, by symbolical representation, his gracious purposes towards his people. The first of these visions, which appeared to the prophet during the night, was that of "a man riding upon a red horse," "among the myrtle-trees," and accompanied by others behind him, on "red horses, speckled, and white." This man, who is represented as the chief or leader of the others, is subsequently called, "The Angel of the Lord;" and it were easy, I think, to show, from the whole analogy of Scripture, that it was none other than Christ, appearing as he was wont frequently to appear to his servants in Old Testament times, especially on great emergencies, when the Church stood peculiarly in need of consolation and encouragement. While the prophet contemplated this vision, anxious, of course, to understand its

import, it appears that an angel was commissioned to interpret or explain it to him. By the intervention of this angel, the prophet was given to understand that the horsemen, whom he saw following or standing behind the Angel of the Lord, were messengers who had been sent forth "to walk to and fro through the earth," and that they had returned and reported to "the Angel of the Lord,"—"the Captain of the Lord's host,"—that they had executed their commission, and that, behold, all the earth did sit still, and was at rest. By this was meant, as appears from what follows, that all the nations were in the enjoyment of peace and prosperity,—a state which presented a striking contrast to the unsettled condition of God's own people, who were still exposed to much annoyance from the hostility of their neighbours around them. But it was the very purpose of the vision to intimate to the prophet, and through him to the Jews, that they were not forgotten, and that it was on their account that messengers had been sent forth, to walk to and fro through the earth, as preparatory to an interposition for their relief and enlargement; for, on the report of those who had been so commissioned to survey the state of the nations, the Angel of the Lord himself becomes the intercessor on behalf of Judah and Jerusalem: "Then the Angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?"

Thus Christ was revealed, even in Old Testament times, as the advocate and intercessor of his Church, his redeemed people, pleading on their behalf the Father's promise, though he might "visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes," yet his loving-kindness would he not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. And this intercession was heard; for he was answered, as the interpreting angel told the prophet, "with good words and comfortable words." What these good and comfortable words were, we learn from the subsequent verses, or rather from those and from the five following chapters. The substance of these good words was, that God not only remembered Jerusalem and Mount Zion, and had not laid them desolate, and cast them off for ever, but that he was watching over them with great care, and looking with

jealousy on every effort that was made to injure them,—that he was about to visit his former dwelling-place with great mercies,—that his house should, assuredly, be again built there, in spite of all opposition,—and that prosperity and plenty should again reign throughout all the cities of Judah. And these good words the prophet was commanded to announce to his brethren, for their consolation and encouragement: "So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus saith the Lord; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem."

Such was the import of the first vision which was vouchsafed to the prophet, as explained to him by the interpreting angel, and I need hardly remark, that the revelation which it made of the divine purposes was fitted greatly to comfort and encourage God's believing people in their depressed and unsettled condition; especially when that vision was followed by others, as we find it was, all of them very emphatically declaring, not only that the temple should be rebuilt and Jerusalem restored, but that there was in reserve for the Church a time of prosperity and glory, such as neither they nor their fathers had ever witnessed. But while the whole of the divine communication was full of consolation and encouragement to God's depressed and perplexed people, there was something peculiarly affecting in that portion of it which forms the subject of consideration, as very expressively assuring them that, in the very depth of their affliction and merited chastisement, his thoughts towards them were thoughts of peace and love: "And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction." This is, indeed, altogether a very remarkable declaration. It assured the Jews that God was sore displeased with the heathen who had carried them captive, though that captivity had been long threat-

ened, and when it did take place was declared to be the doing of the Lord. Through many generations, and by a long succession of prophets, God had warned his people that if they did not repent and return to him, he would deliver them into the hand of their enemies, who would carry them forth from the land of their fathers into a land where they should worship gods of gold, and wood, and stone, as they had been so prone to do,—that is to say, where they would discover, in their bitter experience, how little the false gods of the nations, whose service they had often preferred to the service of the God of their fathers, could do for them in the time of trouble. Of the captivity of Israel, the ten tribes, it had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah: "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets." And the captivity of Judah was thus predicted by the prophet Jeremiah: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel; Behold, ... I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm,"—the very language in which he had been wont to describe the mighty deliverances which he had wrought for them,—behold, "I will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence. And afterward, saith the Lord, I will deliver Zedekiah, king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those that seek their life: and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy."

After predictions like these, the Jews might have concluded, that whatever cruelties they might experience at the hand of the heathen, nothing had befallen them but what was not only foreseen and fore-ordained in the divine counsel, but authorised also on the part of their enemies, whom God had commissioned thus to execute his righteous purposes of judgment. That they had

deserved all that they suffered, they would very readily acknowledge, as soon as they were brought to an humble and penitent frame of spirit, as the remnant of Judah were after seventy years' captivity. But they might also have concluded, that their enemies who carried them captive had done nothing but what they had been commissioned, and therefore authorised to do; and, consequently, had incurred, by the cruelties which they had inflicted on them, no such guilt as would bring down upon them the special displeasure of God. How deeply affecting, then, must it have been to the truly penitent and godly among the Jews to be addressed in the words of the passage before us!—words which implied that God had never ceased to regard them with pity, even while suffering what he had predicted and threatened them with, and words which implied also that the enemies who inflicted these sufferings, though permitted, and, in a certain sense, commissioned by him, were, nevertheless, doing what was sorely displeasing in his sight: "And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased," that is, with you, my people, "and they helped on the affliction." And if such was the compassion and tenderness with which God regarded them, even while suffering the necessary consequence of their backsliding and revolt, how certainly might they not reckon on his returning favour, when grace had been given them to return to him! But they were not left merely to infer this; for it is added in the immediately following context, "Therefore thus saith the Lord; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem."

The passage under consideration, then, conveyed to the Jews an assurance of God's favour and protection in a far more emphatic and impressive manner than any direct promise, however explicit; and while it could not fail to awaken their admiration, and to convince them, that severely as they had been visited for their transgressions, it was still the visitation of a father who inflicteth not willingly. The statement before us presents a very interesting view of the moral government of God in reference to his dealings with his ancient people, which we would do well carefully to consider and remember. Throughout the whole history of that people, as recorded in the Scriptures, we find God em-

ploying other nations to execute his judgments upon them ; and to prevent the possibility of their supposing or alleging that these inflictions were not appointed by him, he commissioned his prophets to warn them, that he would bring against them such and such nations, and to foretell with great minuteness the very kind of sufferings which these nations would assuredly inflict upon them. Nothing, therefore, could be clearer or more certain than that the judgments which overtook Israel and Judah were the appointment of God, and that they took place at the time, in the manner, and by the instruments that he had determined. But we are not to conclude from this that these nations received a commission from God to do what they did, in such a sense as to render their treatment of his backsliding people a lawful thing on their part, or well-pleasing in his sight. He employed them as instruments, making their wrath to praise him ; but it was wrath still, and the object of his holy indignation and abhorrence. They had no authority from him to slay his people with the sword, or to carry them captive into a foreign land ; nor was it from any desire to execute his will, or to vindicate his truth and faithfulness, that they acted as they did. So we find it expressly said of the king of Assyria, in the prophecy to which I have already referred, when, after declaring that God would send him against an hypocritical nation, "to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets," it is added, "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. . . . . Wherefore, it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom: for I am prudent." And so it was foretold, in like manner, of the king of Babylon, who was appointed to burn Jerusalem and the temple with fire, and carry Judah into captivity: "Israel is a scattered sheep ; the lions have driven him away : first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones. Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria. . . . . The voice of

them that flee and escape out of the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the Lord our God, the vengeance of his temple. . . . . Recompense her according to her work; according to all that she hath done, do unto her: for she hath been proud against the Lord, against the Holy One of Israel."

While the nations, therefore, were thus employed, and in a certain sense commissioned to execute God's judgments on Israel and Judah, their doing so was the dictate of their own ungodly ambition; and so far from being done from a reverential regard to God's authority, and a desire to execute his will, it was a profanation of his holy name, a denial of his sovereignty as the only living and true God. In the very execution of his purposes, therefore, they contracted guilt and incurred God's righteous displeasure,—even to their utter overthrow and irremediable ruin; for we find that the judgments denounced against them were very different indeed from those of which Israel and Judah were warned. In kind they might be much the same, but very different as to their result. The severest threatenings which were addressed to the Jews were uniformly accompanied with such promises as did very plainly intimate that it was not the purpose of God to make a full end of them,—that there was among them a remnant according to the election of grace,—and that, in regard to them, he had not forgotten and could not break the covenant which he had declared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. No doubt to many even of Israel and Judah,—to all, indeed, who were finally impenitent and unbelieving,—God's judgments were visitations only of wrath. But to the remnant who constituted his Church, these judgments, however severe, were still but fatherly chastisements; and hence the gracious promises with which the most alarming of his threatenings were accompanied or mingled up. But in regard to the nations by whose instrumentality God carried his threatenings into effect,—Babylon for example,—the judgments of God were inflictions of wrath, denounced in such terms as these: "As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the Lord; so shall no man abide there,"—that is, in Babylon,—"neither shall any son of man dwell therein;"—"And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for dragons, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant. . . . . Her cities

are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby." And all this is, I think, plainly intimated in the passage we are now considering, by the different manner in which God speaks of his displeasure with Judah, and his displeasure with those who had carried them captive: "I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction."

It appears, then, that throughout the whole history of God's ancient people, as recorded in the Scriptures, those who treated them severely, even though only inflicting what their sins deserved, and what they had been previously warned of, were regarded and dealt with by God as guilty of oppression and cruelty,—as, in fact, presumptuously fighting against God. Even those who rejoiced in the disaster and captivity of Israel and Judah were regarded in the same light, and judged in the same manner; for the prophet Ezekiel was commanded to say of the Ammonites, "Thus saith the Lord God, Because thou saidst, Aha, against my sanctuary, when it was profaned; and against the land of Israel, when it was desolate; and against the house of Judah, when they went into captivity; . . . . . because thou hast clapped thine hands, and stamped with the feet, and rejoiced in heart with all thy despite against the land of Israel; behold, therefore I will stretch out mine hands upon thee, and will deliver thee for a spoil to the heathen; and I will cut thee off from the people, and I will cause thee to perish out of the countries: I will destroy thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord." And if such was the guilt incurred by all who oppressed and afflicted them, whatever might be the amount of their own delinquencies, during that portion of their history which is contained in Scripture, is there not reason to conclude, that in the treatment which they have met with in the course of their subsequent history, the nations of the world among whom they have been scattered have to no small extent incurred similar guilt? It is true, the last dispersion of the Jews did not take place till they filled up the measure of their iniquity, when they crucified and slew the Lord of glory; and it is only since that dispersion that the threatenings recorded at the very commencement of their history as a nation, even by

Moses himself, have been executed in all their severity, and to their full extent. Compared with what they have endured since the crucifixion of Christ, all their former sufferings may be regarded as light, just as the guilt of that deed unspeakably exceeded all their former transgressions.

But though this be true, and though nothing has befallen them but what was determined and foretold, it does not follow that the nations which have been employed as the instruments in fulfilling God's purposes have incurred no guilt by the part which they have acted. God has not cast away his ancient people for ever. If they are the subject of terrible threatenings, which ages of suffering have not yet exhausted, they are the subject of promises also in the fulfilment of which all the splendour of their former state, while enjoying most largely the manifestations of the divine favour, will be lost in the surpassing glory of the display of Christ's power on their behalf, when the receiving of them into his fold shall be, not to themselves only, but to the world, life from the dead. The Old Testament is full of such promises concerning the restoration of Israel, and the glory of Zion in the latter day, as no attentive reader can believe have yet been fulfilled in any or in all of the deliverances which have been wrought on their behalf. And some of these promises are to be found in this and the immediately preceding and following prophecies, all of which were subsequent to the great and more distinguished events of their history. But if there were any doubt as to the interpretation of these prophecies regarding the restoration of the Jews to the place which they once occupied in the Church of the living God, it has been removed by the apostle, who has told us that these promises are yet to be fulfilled. "For I would not," says he, speaking to Gentiles,—"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

And if there be a generation of Israel who are one day to be the heirs of promises like these, and in whose experience they are to be fulfilled, what nation on earth, especially what Chris-

tian nation, was warranted to assume that eighteen hundred years would elapse before these promises were to be carried into effect, and that, therefore, no attempt needed to be made to convince them that the Messiah promised to their fathers had appeared, and had been crucified in the person of Jesus of Nazareth? In so far as Christian nations or communities thought themselves free from the obligation of seeking to bring the Jews into the fold of Christ, they were evidently guilty of great sin. But even if it had been revealed that century after century was to pass away, and Israel were still to remain in impenitence and unbelief, were the nations thereby entitled to treat them with scorn and cruelty? Who among these nations could allege that God had given them a commission to avenge the quarrel of his covenant with his backsliding, or even apostate people? God had warned them by the mouth of Moses, that if they forsook him, and broke his covenant, he would bring a nation from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth, a nation of fierce countenance, who should not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young. But could the nation which executed this threatening show any better or more direct warrant for doing so than Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar of old could do for the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem? It was also foretold by Moses, "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; . . . . . and among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest; but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: in the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see."

And all this has been fulfilled. For generations, the dispersed of the children of Israel suffered all that Moses thus threatened their fathers with,—suffered it even in the countries which were called Christian, and that, too, on the plea that it was right and well-pleasing in the sight of God so to deal with them because of their unbelief. But what else was such a plea than a daring

usurpation of the prerogative of God? He did, no doubt, threaten them with these calamities, and the threatening could not fail of being executed; but he gave no authority or warrant to any of the nations so to vindicate his cause, and he did not need to do so. There was enough of selfishness, avarice, and cruelty in the human heart to ensure the execution, to the very letter, of the severest judgments which were to be inflicted on them; and the denunciation of these judgments, therefore, unaccompanied with a special commission to any one nation or people to execute them, was a most appalling testimony to the desperate wickedness of the human heart. It implied that there was no need of any other provision being made for the execution of the divine purpose of punishing Israel than merely to leave men to act, without restraint, according to the dictates of their own corrupt nature; and the result has shown, that even nations calling themselves Christian have been chargeable, and to a fearful extent, with what was brought against the nations of old, when it was said, "I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction."

The grievous persecution to which the Jews were for ages exposed, even among the nations of Christendom, has, in a great measure, passed away. But even the communities or kingdoms who entertain more enlightened and scriptural views of the principles of the divine government, may, I fear, be still exposed to the charge stated in the verses before us. Though not set at ease in the sense in which the heathen are said in the passage before us to have been,—that is, in the possession of power, rejoicing in the conquest which they had made of Israel, and triumphing in the desolation of Judah and Jerusalem,—yet even the Churches of Christ may have been at ease in the sense of enjoying their own privileges, without feeling or manifesting any lively interest in the conversion or restoration of God's ancient people; and if so, then they have been helping forward the affliction of that people. According to the divine purpose, indeed, the unbelief of the Jews has not been protracted one day beyond what has been determined. But we have nothing to do with that. Our duty is to seek, and pray, and labour for their conversion. So far, therefore, as we have failed to do so, we

have been the means whereby their time of unbelief has been protracted, and their state of dispersion continued. Our efforts might not have been effectual, but this does not acquit us of the guilt of neglecting to make these efforts. We are chargeable, as the Assyrians and Babylonians were, with helping forward the affliction. We know not, as none who have gone before us have known, the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power in regard to the ingathering of his ancient people, the children of Abraham, his friend. But if our Lord commanded his disciples to begin their apostolic labours at Jerusalem, it was plainly the duty of every successive generation of Christians to labour as if the restoration of Israel might take place in their own day. It is matter of gratitude and thanksgiving to God, that something approaching to this feeling seems to have been awakened among the Churches of Christ; and how powerfully is the passage before us fitted to keep alive and encourage this feeling! It represents the divine compassion towards Israel in a point of view the most affecting. It speaks as if the cruelties which the heathen inflicted on his people had been more numerous and severe than he intended they should be. Absolutely they could not be so; for to Him who knoweth the end from the beginning, nothing can be unexpected or unforeseen. But the language expresses very emphatically how offensive in his sight were the cruelties which were perpetrated on Israel, as if the heathen had gone beyond what he had permitted them to do: "I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction." And with what complacency, then, must he not look on the simple, sincere, and affectionate efforts of his believing people on behalf of the hitherto outcast children of Jacob! The extent to which these efforts may be rendered immediately effectual will be determined by his sovereign good pleasure. But their visible success is not to be assumed as the test of his approbation. If his people give themselves to prayer, and embrace the opportunities afforded them in his providence for diffusing the knowledge of the Gospel among the people of Israel, they may rest assured that they are engaged in a work on which he looks with complacency, and that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. It is a work,

too, in which they cannot be deeply interested without finding that it exercises a very salutary influence on their own souls.

The restoration of the Jews, as foretold in Scripture, is a very solemn subject. It is intimately connected with the glory of the latter day, or rather it forms a prominent part of that glory, and irresistibly leads our thoughts to the consummation of all things. To ungodly and worldly men it must be an unwelcome subject; for did they believe at all in its reality, they would be alarmed at the prospect of such a diffusion of Gospel light and such a state of holiness as is implied in the conversion of the Jews, when the fulness of the Gentile nations shall also be brought in, inasmuch as it would force upon them a very vivid impression of the great realities of eternity. To Christians, therefore, it must be a very profitable subject of meditation; for it cannot fail to operate in weaning their affections from worldly vanities, impressing them with the littleness of earthly things as compared with the glorious events which must accompany and follow, perhaps also precede, the restoration of God's ancient people, quickening them to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure, inasmuch as it must carry forward their thoughts to the second coming of the Son of man, and press upon them the momentous question, whether they are so cleaving to and abiding in him, "that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

LXIII.

CHRIST THE DEFENCE AND GLORY OF HIS CHURCH.

ZECHARIAH II. 4, 5.

THE divine revelations which were made to the prophet Zechariah concerning Jerusalem,—that is, concerning the Church,—were communicated chiefly, or at least to a great extent, in visions, and these visions were explained to him by an interpreting angel. Two of these are related in the preceding chapter. In the first, as we have already seen, there appeared to the prophet "a man riding upon a red horse," accompanied by others, who followed, or stood behind him. This man, here called "the Angel of the Lord," was evidently none other than the glorious person who was known to the Old Testament Church as "the Angel of the covenant," and as "the Captain of the Lord's host,"—that is, Christ himself. And the import of the vision was, that he was about to interpose on behalf of his long-oppressed and still harassed people, and to execute judgment on the nations that had oppressed them, and were then at ease, enjoying, in fancied security, outward prosperity and peace. In the second vision, the prophet beheld "four horns," of which he was told that they were "the horns which had scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." It will be recollected that "horn" is an emblem very frequently employed in Scripture to denote power, especially the power of kings and kingdoms. Horns, then, are very appropriately used here to denote the nations that had invaded, oppressed, and carried captive Israel and Judah; and they are

very significantly represented as four in number, corresponding to the four winds, thereby intimating that Israel and Judah had been assailed by adversaries from every quarter,—that, in fact, they were surrounded with enemies on every side. But, along with the four horns, the prophet beheld "four carpenters," or, as some render it, "four smiths;" and on inquiring what they had come to do, he was told that their commission was to fray or scatter the horns,—that is, to break or destroy their power. They were represented as carpenters, or smiths, persons trained and skilled for the performance of certain work, for the purpose of intimating, I think, that the instruments which the Lord had prepared for the execution of his judgment upon the heathen were thoroughly furnished and strengthened for the work assigned to them, and that the work, therefore, would assuredly be executed. The second vision, then, was a confirmation of the first, assuring the prophet not only that the Lord pitied his people, and had purposes of grace and mercy towards them, but that he was about to make this manifest, by taking vengeance on those that had vexed and oppressed them: "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it."

The prophet was thus assured, for the consolation and encouragement of the people of God, that they were to be delivered from the disquietude and oppression to which they were still subject, and that, in spite of all the opposition which they experienced, the temple would assuredly be rebuilt, and Jerusalem itself restored. But mere deliverance from the power of those who still vexed them, and protection from that annoyance when they were delivered, was not the whole of God's gracious purpose concerning them. He had unspeakably more than this in reserve for his Church; and it was his good pleasure, moreover, to reveal his gracious design to his servant. And, accordingly, another vision was vouchsafed to the prophet, which did very significantly foreshow the future prosperity and glory of the Church. He lifted up his eyes again, and looked, "and behold a man with a measuring-line in his hand;" and on inquiring whither he went, or what he was about to do, the prophet received for answer

that he was about "to measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof." The import of this symbolical act of measuring Jerusalem was fully explained to the prophet, and in a way that was peculiarly fitted to arrest his attention. The angel that talked with him, or the interpreting angel, had left him, as if to gain information for him, when he was met by another angel, who said unto him, "Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein." The purpose of measuring Jerusalem was now plain. It was to ascertain whether it would be capable of containing all the people, when they should be multiplied, as God graciously purposed to multiply them. The result of the measurement was, that it could not contain them,—that the increase of the people was to be such, that the space which was wont to be surrounded with walls would be too strait for them,—and that they must spread abroad, therefore, and dwell as the inhabitants of towns or villages that had no walls. All this must have been very plain to the prophet as a prediction of the great increase of the people of God; and the care that was taken to explain the import of the symbolical transaction must have been to the prophet a very sure pledge of the due fulfilment of the promise. But had this been all that he was told, the question might naturally have occurred to him, How were the people to be protected from enemies that had already shown themselves abundantly malignant, and who, notwithstanding the discomfiture that awaited them, according to the prediction recorded in the preceding chapter, might again recover their strength, and, with it, more than their former hostility to the people of God? To this question, however, the prophet received a very distinct and cheering reply. He was assured that though the people were to be too numerous to enjoy the protection of fenced cities and walled towns, they should nevertheless be safely protected: "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about."

To the prophet, and, indeed, to all the believing Jews, the language of this promise must have been very emphatic and full of meaning. It would remind them of a memorable period in the early history of their fathers, when the Lord, after delivering them from the bondage of Egypt, was literally a wall of fire

round about them; for it is recorded that when "the Egyptians pursued after them," that is, Israel, "and overtook them encamping by the sea, ... the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night." They would be reminded also of a later period, when Jerusalem and Mount Zion, though not literally surrounded with a wall of fire, were not less securely guarded,—the period of which the psalmist could say, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away." These were glorious periods in their history, which the believing Jews could never think of but with profound admiration; and how consoling and animating to them, amidst all their insecurity and trouble, to be assured, as they were in the passage before us, that the Lord would again be to them what he had been to their fathers, even "a wall of fire round about!" Nor was this all. They were assured that the Lord would not only compass about Jerusalem, but be "the glory in the midst of her." This, too, would remind them of what constituted their chief honour and distinction at a former period of their history, even the symbol of God's presence in the midst of them, when he took possession first of the tabernacle of Moses, and afterwards of the temple of Solomon, as the dwelling-place of his glory. The vision, then, though it presented nothing to the prophet's eye but the simple transaction of a man with a measuring-line, proceeding to measure the length and breadth of Jerusalem, was, nevertheless, significant of great and glorious things concerning the Church,—even such an increase of the people of God, such manifestations of divine power on their behalf, and such precious tokens of the divine presence in the midst of them, as had never at any former period been experienced. Of course, the person who appeared to the prophet to measure Jerusalem must have been the Angel of the

Lord himself, that is, Christ; for to Him alone it belongs to extend his Church, as well as to deliver and protect her. It was to the extension and establishment of Christ's kingdom, then, that the vision did especially refer, as explained to the prophet by the interpreting angel, when he said, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

If the view which we have taken of the passage be correct, then it is plain that the prediction was not fulfilled, and was never intended to be fulfilled, in regard to the literal Jerusalem, and the material temple there. The promise, indeed, was such as could not be exhausted or fully accomplished till Gospel or New Testament times. Nor has it been exhausted yet. But it was, nevertheless, very largely fulfilled, even to the Church of the prophet's day, and of following times. Not only was the temple finished, according to the word of the Lord, spoken by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, but, within seventy years from that time, the walls of Jerusalem were also set up; and though they were built in troublous times, as appears from the Book of Nehemiah, yet the very opposition which the Jews experienced served to show more clearly that the good hand of their God was upon them. And though neither they, nor their children for many generations after them, lived to witness the glorious things here foretold of the extension and prosperity of the Church, yet in this respect they were not in a worse condition than their fathers, inasmuch as to them also the glory of Messiah's kingdom was a future and a still more distant thing. In the meantime, they enjoyed many tokens of God's returning favour, and manifold assurances that, if they confided in his word and walked in his statutes, he would make even their enemies to be at peace with them, and would give them rest and quiet amidst all the revolutions which convulsed the nations around them; while they were receiving, by the mouth of the prophets, not only new, but clearer and more spiritual predictions of what had been the consolation of the Church from the beginning,—namely, the coming of Messiah's kingdom.

Thus the truly godly and believing among the Jews, those who constituted the Church, did share largely in the fulfilment

of this promise; and they had, in what they themselves experienced, a standing pledge that in due time the whole would be fully accomplished. It is, however, to Gospel times that we must look for the full meaning, as well as the accomplishment of the prediction before us. And we find in the very commission which Christ gave to his disciples a striking illustration of the words of the prophet, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth:"—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." This was a very plain intimation that the time was come when "Jerusalem should be inhabited as towns without walls,"—that is, that the Church should no longer be as the inhabitants of a single city. Till then it had been confined to one people, and they at times reduced to a very small number; and though it was open to receive such strangers as might come to inquire after the Lord God of Israel, and to choose him for their God, yet no provision was made for gathering into it the other nations of the world. But at the very commencement of the Gospel dispensation, even before the apostles had entered on their work, the announcement was made that the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was broken down, and that the blessings which Israel had for ages exclusively enjoyed were to be tendered as freely, and in still greater fulness, to men of every country, and kindred, and tongue, and nation. As soon as the apostles fully understood their commission they proceeded to act on this principle, going everywhere preaching the Gospel, "testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." And they were privileged, moreover, to witness, to a great extent, the fulfilment of the prediction before us, even the conversion of countless multitudes in all countries. The prediction even yet, indeed, is not exhausted, and will not be so while there is one nation on the earth that is ignorant of the name of Jesus. But provision is made in the Gospel dispensation for the full accomplishment of all that is here foretold, even for teaching, or making disciples of all nations. And to the Church, to those who are already disciples, it is committed instrumentally to carry this into effect, having for their encouragement the sure promise, that "the earth shall be full of the

knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea,"—that all nations shall be blessed in Jesus, and men of every nation shall call him blessed,—that Messiah's kingdom shall extend "from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."

There was thus, in the very commission which Christ gave to his disciples, provision made for the fulfilment of the prediction, that Jerusalem should be inhabited as towns without walls, or, in other words, that her citizens should so abound that they could not be contained within walls. This, indeed, had been foretold before by the psalmist, when he said, "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth." But our Lord's commission to his apostles, and through them to his people at large, did also provide for the fulfilment of the rest of the promise,—that which referred to the protection, as well as that which concerned the extension of his Church; for to the commission, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations," there was annexed the promise, "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This promise was the same in substance with that before us, though differently expressed, "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her,"—that is, to Jerusalem or the Church,—"a wall of fire round about." But this form of expression was one with which the people of God in Old Testament times were familiar. The idea of being under divine protection must have been associated in their minds with that of being fenced or hedged about, so as to be separated from the rest of the world, and thereby placed beyond the reach of their enemies, or of those judgments which came upon the heathen. Such had been their condition even from the beginning. So it was with them during the latter days of their sojourning in Egypt, when the judgments of the Lord desolated the rest of that land, but touched not Goshen, where Israel dwelt. So it was with them in the wilderness, when the Lord shut them in, himself keeping watch over them, guiding them by a pillar of cloud in the day-time, and a pillar of fire in the night. So it was designed that it should be with them, when the Lord drave out the inhabitants of Canaan before them, and put the fear of them and the dread of them on all the nations that were round about. And so it would have been with them

to the end, but for their courting alliance with these nations, not for the purpose of winning them over to the worship of the true God, but that they themselves might participate in all the abominations of idolatry. When a promise of divine protection, then, was to be given to the Church, it could not be expressed in language more appropriate, and, to the people of God, more significant than in the words, "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about." And yet, strong and emphatic as the language of this promise is, it expresses nothing that is not implied in our Lord's gracious words to the disciples, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Nay, there is in the Saviour's promise a depth of meaning, in regard to the care and tenderness with which he watches over his people, and provides for their security against their enemies, which no language could convey to the Old Testament Church; for though there were vouchsafed to the people of God these various and very unequivocal tokens of the divine presence with them, they knew not, as the Church now knows, "the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh," in very deed dwelling with men on the earth.

The promise, that the Lord himself would be a wall of fire round about Jerusalem, could not fail, indeed, to fill the minds of God's people with holy awe, and, at the same time, awaken a feeling of security and safety. But Christ's promise to his people goes directly to their heart and affections, calling up to their minds all the condescension, and tenderness, and pity, which he manifested towards the sorrowful and afflicted in the days of his flesh, and which was only an example of the love and compassion which, in his exalted and glorified state, he still exercises towards the contrite and downcast in spirit: "Lo, I am with you alway." Christ's promised protection of his people extends to them, not only in their collective capacity as his Church, but individually and personally. In Old Testament times the people of God formed one community, around which the Lord threw a wall of defence, and each individual only shared, as it were, in the protecting power which was exercised over the whole. Christ is still a wall of defence, even a wall of fire, around his Church collectively; for were it otherwise, she had long ere this been overwhelmed under the combined hostility of men and devils. But his Church is no longer formed into one community, and

outwardly separated from an unbelieving and ungodly world. His people are scattered among all nations; and each, therefore, must be the special object of his care, experiencing daily the effects of his gracious interposition, and enjoying, though they may not always recognise, his presence,—the presence, not of a mere symbol of the Divinity, on which they may look, as Israel of old did, but of a living, compassionate, and almighty Saviour, who was afflicted in all the afflictions of his people, and who is still touched with a feeling of their infirmities. In thus caring for and protecting his people, he does not, indeed, exempt them from worldly affliction, or from the assaults of their enemies, even to the extent that Israel were exempted. To the Old Testament Church, it was obviously of the greatest importance for their spiritual interests,—the maintenance of their allegiance to God,—that they should thus be protected from outward enemies, and preserved in the enjoyment of temporal prosperity, by such an immediate operation of divine power as nothing but the most wilful and perverse blindness could mistake. Even when they were in the full enjoyment of this exemption from outward trouble, and were daily experiencing divine interpositions on their behalf, they could not be restrained from seeking after the vanities and abominations of heathen idols; and even the godly among them were but too ready to be infected with the prevailing spiritual malady. And what, then, would have speedily been their condition, if they had not been separated from the rest of the world, and fenced in, moreover, and protected from the allurements, as well as the assaults of the idolatrous nations around them?

It is not so now. The Church of Christ is spread over all lands. His people mingle with men of every country and of all characters,—many of them almost altogether isolated or cut off from the fellowship of their brethren, and not a few exposed to persecution for his name's sake. Yet he is with them still, caring for and protecting them. He does not, indeed, protect them, in the sense of exempting them from the hostility of the world. On the contrary, he manifests his sovereignty, and the more abundant communication of grace which he has procured for them, by rendering their tribulations the very means of promoting their spiritual interests. He will not, however, permit their

spiritual enemies to work all their will upon them. These enemies are absolutely under his control, and can go no farther than he permits; and he will permit them to go no farther than he sees it to be not only consistent with, but conducive to the spiritual good of his people. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." And then he tells them, that he sympathises with them in their sorrows,—that he knows their frame, and is touched with a feeling of their infirmities,—that he himself endured temptation, and is able, therefore, to succour them that are tempted. Can they have a more unequivocal assurance than this, that nothing can be appointed them in the form of tribulation but what is needful for accomplishing his gracious purposes regarding them? And with this assurance, can they ever doubt the faithfulness of the promise, "I will be unto her a wall of fire round about;" "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world?"

But there is more in the passage under consideration than a promise that Christ should be with his Church, and with each individual member thereof, to watch over, and protect, and comfort them: "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." This last part of the promise, like the former, was expressed in language which, as addressed to the Old Testament Church, was alike appropriate and significant. The token or pledge of God's presence with his Church, with which they had from the beginning been familiar, was the Shechinah, or cloud of glory that rested over the mercy-seat. This token of God's presence had been withdrawn at, if not before, the destruction of the first temple, and was never again restored, even when the temple was rebuilt. But the Jews never could forget that for ages it had constituted their chief honour and distinction, the permanent intimation of God's nearness to them, and the surest pledge of his protection; and, therefore, a promise that God would dwell in Jerusalem, or his Church, could not be expressed in language more emphatic and full of meaning to them than in the words, "I will be the glory in the midst of her." The fact, then, that, notwithstanding this very strong and explicit promise, the Shechinah, or glory, never was restored to the second temple, and,

therefore, never again dwelt in the literal Jerusalem, should have led the Jews, as it was undoubtedly designed it should, to look for a higher and more spiritual fulfilment of the promise. And, no doubt, it did so in regard to the truly godly and believing portion of the Jews,—those who waited and longed for the consolation of Israel. Yet even they must have had very inadequate conceptions of what was implied in the promise, compared with what is now revealed by its fulfilment in the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, and his permanent presence with his Church by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And here, again, the promise that Christ would be the glory in the midst of Jerusalem, is not merely a promise to the Church generally,—that is, to the whole body of true believers in their collective capacity,—that Christ by his Spirit will be in the midst of them; the promise extends to each believer, individually and personally. From the very nature of the thing, it cannot be otherwise. It is not with the indwelling of the Spirit in the Church as it was with the Shechinah of old, which, though confined to the temple in Jerusalem, was a pledge of the divine favour and protection to every true believer in Judea. The Spirit dwells in the Church only in so far as he dwells in the individuals of whom the Church is composed. Christ promised the Spirit to his disciples personally, as the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who was to guide them into all truth, taking of the things that were Christ's, and showing them unto them. And it is of believers personally and individually that the apostle speaks, when he says: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." And again, "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

If, then, we are to profit by the promise in the passage before us, that promise, in all its extent, must be fulfilled in us personally. There is no general storehouse of spiritual influence in the Church at large, out of which we may draw a share, as out of a common treasury. Either we are the temples of the Holy Ghost,

or we are not. If we are, then we form part of the living spiritual building which constitutes the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory on the earth; and, as living stones in that temple, we are as really the subjects of the Spirit's gracious influence as the whole building is. But if we are not individually the temples of the Holy Ghost, then, though intimately connected with thousands who are, and though professedly belonging to them, we are deriving no benefit from the connection. The spiritual influence which has made, and which continues to keep them alive, does not profit us; we have as yet no lot or portion in the promise which we have been considering. And what, then, is the Spirit's work in the soul which he makes his temple or dwelling-place? This question is very largely answered in the Scriptures, and it were a lengthened statement even to quote the passages which directly refer to it. But the Spirit's work may be set forth in a single sentence, and that naturally suggested by the subject before us. It is to transform the sinner into the image of Christ. This is the ultimate object of all the quickening, life-giving, comforting, and sanctifying power which he puts forth on the soul; and in proportion as the lineaments of Christ's image become more distinct and more clearly defined in his people, the more fully is the promise accomplished. The Shechinah, or glory, in the temple of old, was but the type of Christ. He is the true brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person; and when he appeared in this world, they who had spiritual discernment "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." He is no longer personally on the earth; it was expedient for his people that he should go away. But he has sent his Holy Spirit to abide with them, not only that he may comfort, but that he may sanctify them,—that they may be separated from a world lying in sin,—that they may have the same mind in them which was also in him,—that they may have the same zeal for the glory of God, and the same kindness and good-will to men,—that in all things they may walk even as he walked. And if Christ's people universally did thus, in their temper, their spirit, their disposition, and walk and conversation, reflect the image of Christ, could even the world itself deny that he is not only a wall of fire round about his Jerusalem, but the glory in the midst of her?

LXIV.

THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST OF THE CHURCH IS RESISTED BY SATAN.

ZECHARIAH III. 1-5.

THIS passage contains an account of the fourth of a series of visions which were presented to the prophet Zechariah, for the purpose of making known to him, and through him to the people of God, the divine purposes regarding the Church. The three visions previously vouchsafed to him are related in the 1st and 2d chapters. The object of these, as we have already seen, was to comfort and encourage the Jews who had returned from the captivity in Babylon, and had begun to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, but were greatly hindered and annoyed by the people of the land around them. So vexed were they, indeed, and so hopeless did their undertaking appear, that they sank, first, into great depression, and then, as a natural consequence, into unbelief. In this state, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were sent to rebuke and admonish them; and the rebuke being received with meekness and humility, it was followed by great encouragement. They were assured, by the visions which appeared to the prophet, that, in spite of all opposition, the building of the temple, which had been long interrupted, would assuredly be completed, and that Jerusalem itself would be rebuilt; and not only so, but that this gracious return of God to his people, after having had indignation against them for threescore and ten years, was but the commencement of an interposition which was to terminate

in the extension and prosperity of the Church, unspeakably beyond any thing that had ever been witnessed. This renewed promise of Messiah's kingdom,—the glory of Gospel times,—must have been rich in consolation to the godly Jews of the prophet's time; for though they were not to witness the fulfilment of that promise, yet it was a pledge to them, that the deliverance which they had experienced, and the still greater enlargement which they were taught immediately to look for, was not merely a temporary relief,—"a little reviving" in their bondage,—but the beginning of a divine interposition which was to bring about the fulfilment of all the glorious things that had been spoken of Zion.

But here a question might naturally occur to the truly penitent and godly of the Jews,—those who were feelingly alive to their unworthiness and sin. How, they might ask, can such blessings be extended to us, rebellious as we have been, and sinful as we still are? It was the sin of our fathers that sent them into captivity, and can we expect to fare better? This, as every humble and contrite sinner knows, was a question which could hardly fail to occur to the penitent Jews; and it was obviously the purpose of this vision to solve this question, by showing to God's humble and contrite people that he had himself provided a Mediator who should offer such an atonement and make such an intercession on their behalf as might give them the assurance of acceptance with God. In that vision the prophet saw "Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." Some have supposed that this was designed to represent a judicial proceeding, the Angel appearing as a judge, Joshua the accused person, and Satan the accuser. And, no doubt, wherever Satan appears, it must be as an accuser, for that has been his character from the beginning. But the general tenor of Scripture language obviously requires, I think, that the transaction be viewed in a somewhat different light. To "stand before any one" is an expression frequently used in Scripture, not, however, to denote the appearance of an accused person before his judge, but the appearance of a servant in the presence of his master, ready to receive his instructions and obey his will. There are more examples of this use of the expression than it would be easy to reckon up;

and it is especially employed to express the service of the priests, of whom it is said that they were separated "to stand before the Lord to minister unto him, and to bless in his name." And with regard to the expression, "standing at his right hand," which is here applied to Satan, it is used, not in reference to a witness, or an accuser before a judge, but as denoting a friend or an enemy, whose object it is to help or to hinder the person at whose right hand he stands. Of this, too, there are examples in Scripture which I need not quote. Taking the expressions, then, in these senses, the vision which appeared to the prophet represented Joshua the high priest, in his public or official capacity, acting not for himself alone, but for the people of God also, as engaged in the service of the Lord, seeking to carry into effect the divine promises concerning his ransomed and restored people, while Satan laboured, and apparently with too much success, to paralyse Joshua's right hand in all his efforts on behalf of God's heritage.

And need I remark how strikingly the vision, thus interpreted, represented the actual condition at the time, as well as the recent history, of the people of God? They had been delivered from a bondage of seventy years' duration,—they had been brought in safety to the land of their fathers,—they had witnessed, to a certain extent, the re-establishment of the worship of the true God in Jerusalem,—and they had been permitted to lay the foundation of the house of the Lord, as the first step towards the full enjoyment of all those privileges which their fathers had enjoyed in the former temple, but which, by their backsliding and apostasy, they had forfeited and lost. Satan, the great adversary, had seen, with envy and malignant hatred, this restoration of God's people, and the prospect of the true religion being again re-established; and he had set himself to resist it. It appeared, too, as if he had well nigh succeeded. He had stirred up from without bitter hostility to the Jews, whereby they had been prevented from carrying on that work, the restoration of the house of the Lord, the completion of which was essential to the enjoyment of all their former privileges. But he had awakened, and was labouring to keep alive, a still more formidable opposition from within, even in their own hearts. They had given way, as we have already seen, to desponding thoughts as to God's gra-

cious designs regarding them, doubting whether he was yet pacified towards them, or whether they had not forfeited by their sins the fulfilment of the promises which had gladdened their heart when they departed out of Babylon, the land of their bondage.

It must have been Satan's great object, then, to confirm and deepen this despondency, as the most effectual way of resisting Joshua in the great work to which he had been called. And every thing might seem favourable to his malignant purpose. "Joshua," it is said, "was clothed with filthy garments" as he "stood before the Angel." He appeared as high priest, the representative of the people, transacting with God on their behalf; but instead of appearing in clean garments, as the high priest was required to do, and always did, when he went with the blood of atonement into the holiest, he stood clothed in the filthy garments of his own sins and the sins of the people. In such circumstances, the success of his mediation and the acceptance of his services might appear hopeless; and Satan would have gained his purpose if he could have brought Joshua to think so,—if he could have led him to the despairing conclusion that God had utterly forsaken his people, and had for ever forgotten to be gracious.

But at the very moment that Satan seemed to triumph, he was to undergo a signal defeat; for "the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" This last expression refers to the captivity from which Joshua had been delivered,—the fiery trial from which he and God's believing people had made their escape. When the captivity took place,—when Jerusalem was destroyed, and the house of the Lord was burned with fire,—and when there was no longer a spot on the surface of the earth of which it could be said that God had chosen it to put his name there,—Satan might triumph as if he had gained a complete and final victory,—as if there were no longer any living testimony for the supremacy of the true God, in opposition to the false gods of the heathen. But, as in the iron furnace of Egypt, so in the fiery trial of the bondage in Babylon, God preserved his elect remnant, and, at the appointed time, delivered them from the furnace, and brought them again to their own land; and here we find them standing before the Lord, in the person of the high priest, their represen-

tative. Satan, indeed, though defeated, also stood there, still prosecuting his malignant purpose of working their utter destruction. But he was only working his own discomfiture. The Lord rebuked him. And the Lord's rebuke was not a mere expression of displeasure or disapprobation. It was not merely an intimation to him that he sought in vain the destruction of Joshua, who had already been delivered from apparently irremediable ruin. This was, indeed, very emphatically intimated in the question, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"—as if it had been said to Satan, Dost thou think to pluck out of my hand my servant, mine elect, whom I have already delivered from thy fiercest assaults? But the rebuke of the Lord implied much more than this. The word of the Lord, whether for rebuke or for blessing, is everywhere represented in Scripture as accompanied by, or carrying with it, a divine power giving effect to the rebuke or the blessing. The expression, "rebuke of the Lord," is especially employed to denote a manifestation of the mighty power of God, as when the psalmist says, "The Lord rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up;" or when it is said in Malachi concerning the enemies of Judah, "I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground."

And so it was in the case before us. The malignant purpose of Satan was defeated. His strength was met and resisted by One stronger than he, and the power of his temptation was broken. He sought to overwhelm Joshua under a despairing sense of the guilt of sin,—his own sin, and that of the people whom he represented. But the Angel before whom he stood, the Messenger of the covenant, whose prerogative it is to forgive sins, declared that Joshua for himself, and for the people on whose behalf he transacted, was accepted before God; for "he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him,"—that is, Joshua,—"he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." While this most significant vision was passing before the prophet, he had looked on in silence. But, as if emboldened by so encouraging a manifestation of grace and mercy, and deeply interested in the welfare of the people, he prayed that, besides the change of raiment,

a fair mitre also should be placed on Joshua's head, either more fully to intimate that every thing unclean, whereby he had been defiled, was taken away, or, as some think, to denote that he was permanently established in the office of the priesthood. And the prophet's petition was granted; for "they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments." And then, to show with what care and tenderness the Angel of the covenant watched over the interests of his people, he is represented as remaining to witness the execution of the commands which he had given to his servants concerning Joshua, as if to make sure that these commands were fulfilled; for while they set a fair mitre on Joshua's head, and clothed him with garments, we are told that "the Angel of the Lord stood by."

Such appears to me to be the import of the vision vouchsafed to the prophet, and by him communicated to the people in the name of the Lord. And could we conceive any communication better fitted to "revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones" in Judah? Viewed merely in reference to them, and as designed to strengthen their faith, and revive their hope, and refresh their spirits, in their downcast condition, it presents us with a view of the divine compassion and tenderness, on which believers of all times may dwell with admiration, and from which they may draw largely both instruction and encouragement. But while the vision here related was framed with divine skill and kindness to re-assure the hearts of the dispirited children of the captivity,—the Church of that time,—it was also fitted, and, I think, designed to foreshadow a far more glorious transaction,—a transaction to which we must trace all that the Church has from the beginning experienced, and all that she will to the end experience, of such gracious interposition as that here recorded. When we read of "Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him," our thoughts are naturally directed to Him of whom Joshua was but the type, even to the great High Priest of the Church, Jesus, who saves his people from their sins. Of him it is emphatically true, that as High Priest, transacting for his people, he stood before the Lord, and Satan stood at his right hand to resist him. From the beginning, it was the great object of the wicked one to defeat the gracious

purposes of God regarding his Church; and, accordingly, he was from the beginning a liar and a murderer, the great adversary and accuser of the brethren, ever ready, as in the case before us, to stand at their right hand to resist them. But his enmity was especially called forth, and his most daring and desperate assaults were directed against Him who was emphatically the Seed of the woman. These assaults were indeed desperate; for every defeat which he had already experienced was an intimation of the infallible certainty of that complete overthrow which he was to sustain, when the Angel of the covenant, as the Seed of the woman, was to bruise his head. It was that glorious Person himself that came to the help of Joshua, as this vision represents; and he did so on the ground of that certain victory which he was himself one day to achieve, when he should spoil principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, and triumphing over them in his cross.

But though Satan's defeat was thus as certain as the unchangeable purpose of God, yet his assault on the Saviour, in which he was permitted to put forth all his power, was not the less violent and persevering. It is a very mysterious subject altogether; and we are not warranted to speculate on it beyond what is written. But enough has been written to show that Satan was permitted to do his utmost to harass and disturb the holy human nature of the Saviour; and that, moreover, he did grievously distress him. The history of the temptation in the wilderness plainly intimates that the tempter had power, for a season, over the bodily comforts of Jesus, so as to withhold these; and also that he had power to present to the soul of Jesus such objects of contemplation as, in a season of bodily suffering from hunger, and thirst, and weariness, were fitted to awaken a feeling of dissatisfaction with the appointments of his heavenly Father, or some fear and misgiving as to the issue of the undertaking in which he was engaged. All these temptations, indeed, were resisted, and all the horrible suggestions of the wicked one were repelled. But who can estimate the amount of suffering which the Saviour endured while the conflict lasted? or who can conceive of the dark forebodings which might settle on his soul, even after the conflict was over, knowing as he did that the devil had departed from him only for a season? And when the

season arrived at which the tempter was permitted to return, and to renew his assault, what must have been the unimaginable horror of that "hour of the power of darkness?" The New Testament does not attempt to describe it; for the human mind could not conceive, and, therefore, human language could not express it. But the New Testament states facts fitted to awaken in our minds an awful apprehension of the sufferings which the holy human nature of the Lord endured; and this passage, I think, throws light on the part which Satan had in inflicting or aggravating these sufferings.

The evangelists, then, tell us, not in their own words, but in the words of Christ himself, as if he alone could speak of his sufferings as it was befitting them to be spoken of,—the evangelists, I say, tell us, that when the time drew near at which he was to pour out his soul an offering for sin, he was heard to say to the three disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me;" that being in an agony, he went a little way from them, and prayed three times, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" and that at last, when he was taken, and condemned, and crucified, he exclaimed, while hanging on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The immediate cause of this amazement, and fear, and feeling of desertion, which overwhelmed the soul, as well as agonised the body of the Lord Jesus, is very plainly stated in Scripture. It was the guilt of his people wherewith he was charged. Though in himself "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," he stood charged with the sins of all his people, and was treated, not by men alone, but by God himself, the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, as the guiltiest of them all. And it is equally clear from Scripture, that while Jesus thus stood before the Lord, Satan stood at his right hand to resist him. And at that moment, what could his resistance be but that by which he had sought to overwhelm Joshua when he stood before the Angel of the Lord, bearing the sins of the people of Judah? All that is said of Satan, in connection with the Saviour's last sufferings and death, plainly intimates that his great effort was to terrify Jesus into a relinquishment of his undertaking, or to sink him into despair under it. He put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus; he so alarmed the

other disciples that they all forsook their Master and fled; he instigated the Jews, with more than human ferocity, to demand the condemnation and crucifixion of the Holy One of God; and what dreadful suggestions he might be permitted to present to and press upon the soul of Jesus in his hour of agony, I cannot tell. But enough, I think, has been said in Scripture, to show that Satan's last and desperate effort was to overwhelm the Saviour in despair; and enough has also been said to tell us that in this lay the strength of the temptation. In the psalms and in the prophets, there is evidence in abundance that Christ felt as if his strength was ready to give way under the load of his people's guilt, when the Lord made to meet upon him the iniquities of them all: "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. . . . . Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me." And in reference to the same mysterious sufferings, it is said by an inspired apostle in the New Testament, that Christ in the days of his flesh, as the great High Priest of his people, "offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death."

It is in this, the hour of the power of darkness, when Satan was permitted, without restraint, to put forth all his might, that we see the terrible conflict that was typically exhibited in Joshua, as represented in vision to the prophet. But if the conflict which Joshua sustained, though both a real and a severe one, did but faintly foreshadow that of the Saviour whom Joshua typified; so the victory which he gained did but very dimly foreshow the glory of the Saviour's triumph. The great adversary seemed to have gained the victory, when, at his instigation, Christ was betrayed, forsaken, condemned, and crucified; but his apparent success was his defeat and ruin. Christ, indeed, suffered and died; but by that very death he destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Christ, it is true, "was crucified through weakness;" but he was "declared to be the Son of God, with power," "by the resurrection from the dead." Christ "humbled himself, and became obedient unto

death, even the death of the cross;" but on that very cross he spoiled principalities and powers, and is now exalted to sovereign authority over them all, being "crowned with glory and honour," and having received "a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." It was for the glory of God that Christ undertook the office of Mediator,—that, by satisfying the demands of the divine law, magnifying and making it honourable, he might render it consistent with the justice and rectitude of God to extend pardon to those whom Satan had involved in guilt and condemnation; and it was to prevent the accomplishment of this glorious undertaking by Christ, as the great High Priest of his people, that Satan stood at his right hand to resist him. It was in the name, therefore, and on the behalf of his people, that Christ suffered and triumphed; and in that triumph "the captives of the mighty" were taken away, and "the prey of the terrible" was delivered. And, accordingly, his people have from the beginning participated in this triumph; for though it was only in the fulness of time that he was manifested in the flesh, and actually appeared to destroy the works of the devil, yet from the beginning he was under a covenant engagement to enter upon and to finish the work which his Father gave him to do; and on the infallible certainty of the fulfilment of his engagement, multitudes, in every age before his coming, participated in the blessings of his redemption. It was on this ground that he did himself appear in vision to the prophet as the Angel of the Lord,—the Messenger of the covenant,—to sustain, and strengthen, and deliver his servant Joshua, when Satan stood at his right hand to resist him; and it was on the same ground that all the Old Testament saints were invested with the title and the privileges of the Lord's ransomed people.

But when we reflect that it is through faith that Christ's redeemed people become partakers of the benefits of his redemption, and that in proportion as their faith is strong and lively their comfort and consolation will abound, how great must appear the advantages which believers now enjoy, above those which

were enjoyed by the Old Testament Church! No doubt, the saints of old had helps to their faith which we have not, because we need them not,—even sensible manifestations, from time to time, of the divine presence, and palpable interpositions of divine power on their behalf; and these tokens of the divine favour could not fail to revive their hope and encourage their hearts. But of the great and glorious triumph prefigured in this vision,—that of which all other deliverances of God's people were the fruits,—they must have had but a very imperfect and indistinct conception; and they must also have been comparatively strangers to that peculiar feeling of love which is awakened in the souls of believers now, by the contemplation of the person of Christ, as God manifest in the flesh, and expressing his love to sinners by the feelings, and affections, and sympathies of their own nature. It was, no doubt, a marvellous revelation of divine grace vouchsafed to Joshua and the Church of his time, when the Angel of the Lord himself appeared to deliver him from the adversary, and to assure him and the people that he had caused their iniquity to pass from them; and when the prophet conveyed this communication to Joshua, it must have filled him and every devout believer in Judah with admiration, gratitude, and confidence. But how much more significant and full of meaning must that very transaction be to believers now, knowing, as they do, that the goodly raiment wherewith Joshua was clothed, and the fair mitre which was set upon his head, were but symbols of the glorious attire in which all Christ's redeemed people are clothed; for of them all it is true that he has washed them from their sins in his own blood, and has made them kings and priests unto God and his Father! That which was exhibited in a vision to the Church of that time, on a special occasion, and for a special purpose, and then ceased, has now become, by the actual manifestation of Christ in the flesh, a permanent object on which, by faith, the eye of believers may continually rest, and an object, moreover, revealed in all its reality, which, to the Old Testament Church, was presented only in types, and figures, and prophecies. Christ, after being manifested to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself, is now exalted a priest upon his throne; and he has given the assurance to his people, that "he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him,

seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them;" that he is not "an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin;" and that, having been so tried and tempted, "he is able to succour them that are tempted."

And what more, then, can mourners in Zion, the downcast and broken in spirit, desire, to revive their souls, and to re-assure their hearts before God? I speak, of course, to those who have the testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity they seek an interest in Christ as their chief good, and the power of living to his glory as their chief end, but who may be still labouring under a depressing fear that they have no part or lot in Christ's salvation, and groaning under the consciousness of having heretofore done little for the advancement of Christ's honour and glory. I would say of all such, that Satan is standing at their right hand to resist them; for he is still permitted, as he was from the beginning, and before Christ came, to tempt men and to seduce them. And the arts which he employs are the same as ever they were. With those who are careless, unconcerned, and self-secure, his plan is to keep them so; and his constant suggestion to them will be, Ye shall not die. It was by this lie that he first seduced man, and brought him under the condemnation and the power of sin; and by the same lie he succeeds in retaining countless multitudes in the same state. But with those who have made the alarming discovery that it is a lie, and in whose conscience a conviction has been awakened, too strong to be stifled, that they must inevitably die eternally if they are not interested in Him who is the only source of life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins;—with such persons Satan must adopt a different course. And he does so; for when his first lie fails him, he has a second in reserve, even that by which he sought to overwhelm Joshua. He insinuates to convicted and depressed sinners that there is no hope for them; and if he does not thereby sink them into despondency, he may set them on some laborious course of self-righteous working to prepare themselves for coming to Christ, but which will only keep them at a distance from him, till they are at last convinced that they are only labouring in the fire, and wearying themselves for very vanity. To all such, then, I would say, look to Him who

delivered Joshua, and who is equally willing to deliver them. Hitherto they have been looking mainly to themselves; and what have they discovered there? They have seen and been convinced that they are clothed with filthy garments; and they have found from experience that these garments become filthier the longer that they look at them, and the more laboriously that they endeavour to make them clean. Indeed, they cannot be made clean,—they must be taken away. This Satan would prevent. But while he stands at their right hand to resist them, the Angel of the covenant also standeth by ready to rebuke him,—and ready, moreover, to put upon them the spotless robe of his own righteousness, wherein they may stand accepted before God. Let them look to him, then, by a simple faith, and he will command concerning each of them, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And unto each of them he will say, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee; and I will clothe thee with change of raiment."

LXV.

THE RESTORATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD.

ZECHARIAH III. 6–10.

THESE verses contain a farther exposition of the vision which appeared to the prophet, as related in the preceding context. The object of that vision, as we have already seen, was to convey to the people of God the assurance of their acceptance with him, by showing them the acceptance of the high priest standing in their room, and transacting with God on their behalf. Other visions had been previously presented to the prophet, by which, as explained to him by the angel, he was authorised and instructed to tell his brethren that they were to be delivered from the state of insecurity and disquietude in which they had been so long kept by the hostility of the people around them,—that the temple which they had begun to rebuild, but which had for so many years been interrupted, should assuredly be completed, —that their former privileges should be restored to them,—and that this interposition on their behalf was to prepare the way for the final inbringing of all the glories of Messiah's reign. These were very encouraging promises; and we could conceive that the glorious prospects which they opened up would serve greatly to animate all classes of the Jews to renewed vigour in the work of rebuilding the temple,—even those of them who had but little, if any, perception of the spiritual blessings involved in these promises. Such persons, indeed, might be the readiest to rejoice in the prospect and rely on the fulfilment of predic-

tions which promised them deliverance from manifold annoyances, and secured to them somewhat at least of the comforts which their fathers had formerly enjoyed. It was the worldly prosperity, of course, that they would chiefly think of; and they would be disposed to conclude, as their fathers before them did, that when God promised them that prosperity, he did thereby bind himself to fulfil that promise absolutely and unconditionally. They would never imagine, that by their sins they might forfeit the fulfilment of what had been promised, or that, because of these sins, the fulfilment might be delayed, though certainly to take place at some future period. Such, we know, was the spirit of their fathers, who held that God was bound to fulfil all that he had promised, while they were at liberty to do or not do what he required. But it would not be so with the truly penitent and godly. They were well aware, and they felt it to be right, that God's promise was not so absolute as to be fulfilled whatever their character and conduct might be. They had already suffered long and sharply for their own sins, and the sins of their fathers; and they were ready to acknowledge the rectitude of the infliction. But, on the same ground, they might be disposed to ask, whether these sufferings were yet over,—whether, with all the unworthiness that they were conscious of, they could hope that the anger of the Lord was yet turned away from them,—whether he was yet pacified towards them for all that they had done. Great and precious, then, as were the promises which the former visions of the prophet conveyed, and glorious as were the prospects which were thereby opened up to the Church, they were not enough to satisfy those who were broken and downcast in spirit, because they were still in doubt whether they were forgiven, and whether, therefore, they had any personal interest in these promises.

So it is with many in reading or hearing the promises of the Gospel. The question will be perpetually occurring to them, Am I warranted to appropriate these promises to myself? or, in other words, Am I forgiven? is the Lord pacified toward me for all that I have done? They may see that the promises are very precious; they may believe that multitudes find in them an abundant source of joy and consolation; and it may be the subject of their regret and humiliation that they, too, cannot rejoice in

and be consoled by them. But they feel that they cannot do so without some good and solid ground to hope that they have been forgiven; and this they cannot conclude so easily as it is to be feared many do, who have little else as the ground of their hope than some confused notion of God's mercy, and who think themselves interested in promises which they have no capacity to enjoy, and which, if they understood what is implied in them, they would have no desire to inherit. Such persons are at ease in Zion. But mourners there cannot be so easily satisfied as to the momentous question whether they have found acceptance with God. It may be found, indeed, that unbelief or self-righteousness lies at the foundation of some of their doubts; and that they are thus depriving themselves of comfort which it is the design of the Gospel that they should enjoy. But still, the good hope that they are reconciled to God is necessary to enable them to rejoice in all the precious promises which are addressed to the Church. So it might have been, and so I doubt not it was with some, perhaps many among the Jews. They might have no doubt that God had a Church among them as he had from the beginning; and they might believe, too, that for this Church he would assuredly do all the great and gracious things which he had promised. But they might require some farther manifestation of his willingness to forgive than they had yet witnessed, to revive their hope, and strengthen their faith, and encourage them to believe that they were interested in the promised blessings. In great kindness, therefore, God was pleased to give them a very unequivocal assurance, that the way of approach to him was laid open again to them as fully and freely as it had ever been to their fathers, and that he was ready to forgive all the sins on account of which they had suffered so long and so severely. By the vision presented to the prophet, he did most emphatically intimate to them that the priesthood, which must have been interrupted in its exercise during their captivity in Babylon, was restored to them, if not in all its former splendour, to dazzle the carnal and worldly-minded, at least in all its efficacy to soothe the spiritually sad and sorrowful. In that vision Joshua, the descendant of Aaron, and the hereditary high priest, appeared in his official capacity as representing the people, and as transacting with God on their behalf; and in this character or capacity he appears

accepted of God, implying, of course, that those whom he represented, those who were truly seeking to be reconciled to God, were accepted also. Joshua, it is true, was clothed with filthy garments,—his own sins and the sins of the people,—and Satan stood to oppose or accuse him, Satan's vocation from the beginning being "the accuser of the brethren." And we can easily conceive what his accusation would be. He would seek to fill Joshua with despair. Can one so filthy, and those whom he represents, and who were equally filthy, find acceptance with the God of purity and holiness?—the very question which he still suggests to convicted sinners, and by which he seeks to awaken in their minds feelings of despondency as to their finding favour with God. But in the case of Joshua the charge was repelled, and Satan himself was rebuked. The Lord declared that he could, consistently with his holiness, accept Joshua and those whom he represented, filthy as their garments were; for he had provided for taking away "the filthy garments from him," and clothing him "with change of raiment," thereby giving him the assurance that the Lord had caused his iniquity to pass from him. And so it will be with every humble and contrite soul whom the great adversary seeks to perplex and trouble. In regard to every such individual it will be said, "The Lord rebuke thee, Satan; .... is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

The office of the priesthood was thus re-established,—or, at least, again recognised in all its efficacy, as the ordinance through which God conveyed to his people the gracious assurance of his forgiving mercy. And this must have been, to the humble and spiritually-minded among the Jews, a far more decisive proof of God's returning favour than even the outward deliverance that was wrought for them, when they were set at liberty by the king of Persia, and conducted in safety to their own land. Even after that deliverance, they were still exposed to so much vexation and trouble, that, judging from mere outward circumstances, they might still doubt whether they were not by their sins lengthening out their season of chastisement, and so preventing the full accomplishment of the promise given by Jeremiah the prophet; for, at a period subsequent to that here referred to, we find Nehemiah, when making confession to God for himself and for the people, thus describing their outward condition: "Be-

hold, we are servants this day, and for the land which thou gavest unto our fathers, to eat the fruit thereof, and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it: and it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure; and we are in great distress." But painful, and, in some measure, perplexing, as these long-continued hardships might be, the truly penitent and godly among the Jews would find abundant consolation under them all, in the very significant and expressive assurance which they received, that the way of approach to God with acceptance, through the mediation of the High Priest, was as open to them as it had ever been to their fathers, even in the most prosperous periods of their history. And a farther and a very solemn assurance was also given, that, if they continued to seek the Lord, he would be found of them, and that the blessings of the priesthood would be extended to their children, for "the angel of the Lord protested," or testified, "unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts." All this did, indeed, plainly intimate, that the promise of the perpetuity of the priesthood through succeeding generations, in the same efficacy as it then existed in the person of Joshua, was not an absolute or unqualified promise, that would assuredly be fulfilled whatever the character of the Jews might be or become. The promise was expressly suspended on the priests, and, of course, the people, walking in the ways of the Lord. And so it proved, in the bitter experience of future times; for so lamentably did both priests and people degenerate, and become hardened in ungodliness, that the latter, by the instigation of the former, crucified and slew the Lord of glory. But the true people of God, for whose sake the vision was presented to the prophet, never would expect that the promise of the continued privileges, which they enjoyed in the priesthood of Joshua, was to be so absolute as that the fulfilment of it might not be forfeited by themselves or their children.

It is so with the Church still. There may be a season of great refreshing and revival, when vital godliness prevails to a great extent, compared with former times, and when there may be a

fair prospect of the good work being perpetuated and extended. Yet the people of God at such a season will feel that there is no absolute security against its being followed by a time of declension and spiritual decay. This, however, would not prevent them from rejoicing in the present revival,—the communications of divine grace,—in which they themselves participate, and of which they see so many others to be partakers. And so it would be with the godly Jews in Zechariah's time. They would rejoice in the establishment of the priesthood in the person of Joshua, and they would cherish the hope that their children after them would duly appreciate and improve the privilege, so that there might never again be such an apostasy or declension as had sent their fathers into captivity. And even if with this hope there might be mingled a feeling of uncertainty and fear lest there should come a falling away, that fear would only render them the more anxious to improve the privileges which they enjoyed, and to employ all the means and the influence which they possessed to transmit these to succeeding generations.

To the promise here given to Joshua, and through him to the people of God, of the perpetuity of the priesthood, and of all the privileges therewith connected, is added, "And I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by;" or, as some render it, "I will give thee guides among these that stand by." Various interpretations have been given of these words. The simplest, I think, and the most accordant with the general tenor of Scripture, is that which supposes that the expression, "These that stand by," means the angels who attended or waited upon "the Angel of the Lord," as appears from the preceding part of this book, and that their guidance or guardianship was promised to Joshua. In what way or to what effect that guardianship was to be exercised, we cannot tell. But such a promise was no new thing to the Church. It was said in the 34th Psalm, "The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them;" and in the 91st Psalm, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." We know, moreover, that in Old Testament times angels were frequently employed in ministrations of mercy to the Church herself, and in the execution of

judgment on her enemies; and it is said of them by an apostle in the New Testament, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Without, therefore, entering on any inquiry into the nature of the service which angels were to perform for Joshua, I would observe, generally, that the promise implied, that he and his successors who walked in the ways of the Lord should be favoured with all those gracious communications which God had been wont to vouchsafe to his faithful servants and believing people. And this was followed up, as promises of present blessings frequently were, with one still richer and more precious, even the promise of Christ himself: "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee," namely, the other priests, "for they," that is, they as well as you, "are men wondered at," or men of wonder, that is, signs or types, "for, behold, I will bring forth my servant The BRANCH." I do not at present enter on the consideration of the word "Branch," as a name or title of Christ, farther than to observe that it was not new to the Church, inasmuch as Messiah had been repeatedly foretold in similar language in the Psalms, and in the prophecies of Isaiah, and twice by this express name in the writings of Jeremiah, with which we may suppose the Jews to have been specially familiar, seeing it was Jeremiah who had explicitly foretold their return from Babylon at the end of seventy years. But what I would especially advert to is the solemn manner in which it was intimated to Joshua, that he himself personally, together with his brethren the priests,—that is, the whole institution of the priesthood,—was but a type of the one only great High Priest from whom that institution derived all its efficacy for conveying peace and a sense of pardon to the people of God. That they should be a type of him was, indeed, a special honour, and laid upon them a very weighty responsibility to walk worthy of their high and holy vocation. But it was, also, fitted to remind them that they were in themselves very weak and worthless,—that they were but the channels through which divine consolation flowed to the Church,—that all the efficacy whereby that consolation was imparted was treasured up in one who had been promised from the beginning, but who had not yet appeared,—and that in the exercise of their office, as transact-

ing between God and the people, they were not lords over God's heritage, but servants in his house, waiting and longing for the coming of their Lord.

The promise was thus a peculiarly precious one to the humble and godly among the Jews. It was not, like many other promises of Messiah, a prediction of him as a deliverer of his people from the power and oppression of their enemies,—a prediction which they had been prone to misinterpret, as referring only to temporal blessings,—but a promise of him in his priestly character and office, as a Mediator between God and them, who was to transact so efficaciously on behalf of his Church, that even the high priest, by whom he was merely typified or prefigured, had authority to proclaim pardon and peace to the truly humble and penitent. And to all such this promise would be unspeakably more consoling than any prospect of worldly prosperity, such as the carnally-minded looked and longed for under the government of the Messiah. It was the very consolation which every convinced sinner still feels to be infinitely more precious than the wealth of worlds, and it was drawn from the same source to which the true penitent still looks,—even the atoning sacrifice of Him who was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," but who "now once in the end of the world hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

This passage, then, contained a promise to the Church of that time, that the priesthood, as revived or re-established in the person of Joshua, was preparatory to the coming of the great High Priest, who was to fulfil all that had been typified and foretold to the Church from the beginning, and of whom we find the prophet, in a subsequent chapter, speaking as "a priest upon his throne." Another promise, moreover, was given,—namely, that the temple which they were then engaged in rebuilding should be finished,—and the fulfilment of this last promise was held out as a pledge or token to the people of God of the certain appearance of "the BRANCH," and of the accomplishment and glorious consequences of his work: "For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes." By the stone which had been laid before Joshua, is meant, I think, the foundation of the temple; and by the expression, "upon one stone shall be seven eyes," we are to understand the

constant care and watchfulness which God would exercise over the work, until it was finished. This interpretation is confirmed, I think, by what we find stated in the following chapter regarding Zerubbabel, who, as the governor of the Jews, was specially intrusted with the charge of restoring the house of God: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven," or, as it has been rendered, "the seven eyes shall rejoice, and see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel, even the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." The import of this figurative language is very plain. It intimates not only the perfect knowledge which God has of all things, but the unceasing care which he exercises in overruling and determining all events, and, consequently, the certainty with which all his purposes are accomplished and all his promises fulfilled. The completion of the temple, then, was infallibly secured, and so were all the glorious events of which it was the type and the pledge. Not only would the stone on which the eyes of the Lord rested in due time bear upon it a renovated temple, but a temple that was to be more glorious than the former; for the Lord of hosts himself was to "engrave the graving thereof,"—a prediction which was fulfilled when that temple was honoured with the personal presence of the Branch,—the Lord of glory,—God manifest in the flesh. Christ's perfect work is, in like manner, foretold in equally expressive terms: "And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day."

The best commentary on this prediction is the account which the apostle gives of the fulfilment of it in the person of Christ, when he contrasts the one sacrifice which the Saviour offered with the many which were offered by the priests under the law: "And every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God..... For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them are sanctified." And the prediction of Christ's finished work is followed up by a very simple but em-

phatic description of its blessed effects: "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree." These few words present a beautiful picture of a state of security, peace, and harmony,—men living together in brotherhood, and in the enjoyment of all that is necessary to their comfort. Though it is the description of a scene of temporal prosperity and plenty, it is designed to represent spiritual blessings, as was usual in Old Testament times; for then temporal good things were not only emblems, but pledges of better, even spiritual blessings,—being a portion of the inheritance which God promised to his believing people. They are employed here, therefore, as they frequently are elsewhere, to set forth the blessings of Messiah's reign,—the peace, and comfort, and security which they would enjoy who were interested in Messiah's finished work. Have we, then, realised in our own experience the blessings here foretold? We have witnessed the accomplishment of Messiah's work,—that work by which he removed the iniquity of the land, even of all the true subjects of his kingdom, in one day. We profess to be the subjects of his kingdom; this profession, if true, implies that through him we have peace with God; and if so, must we not have peace with one another, and so realise the happy state here described? The visible Church, indeed, does not always represent the true Church; and there may be much, therefore, to disturb the harmony and peace which ought to prevail among the professed followers of the Lord Jesus. We are encouraged, moreover, to expect that the time will come when the visible Church will be far more nearly identified with the true Church, and when the scene here described will be very largely, if not universally exhibited, even to the outward eye. But, in the meantime, why should not that state of things be realised among those who do really participate in the blessed fruits of Christ's work? and why should not believers in their individual capacity, and independently of their intercourse with one another, enjoy in large and growing abundance the peace, and comfort, and feeling of safety, which are here promised to those who should live under Messiah's reign? The promise, indeed, does not include any certain portion of the good things of this life, though these are employed as emblems of the richer blessings of grace. But however much believers may lack

the comforts, or, it may be, sometimes the necessaries of life, is not a pacified conscience a perpetual feast? and whatever be their worldly condition, if they can regard what they do enjoy, not merely as the gift of the Creator, but as the portion allotted to them by God as their gracious Father in Christ, may they not say with the apostle, though we may appear as "having nothing," yet we possess "all things?"

LXVI.

"NOT BY MIGHT, NOR BY POWER, BUT BY MY SPIRIT."

ZECHARIAH IV. 6.

In this chapter we have an account of the fifth vision which appeared to the prophet, and the object of which, as of all the others that preceded it, was to make known God's gracious purposes, not only in regard to his believing people of that day, but concerning his Church in all future times. Of these visions it may be remarked, I think, that each of them, in succession, seemed designed to draw away the thoughts of the Jews more and more from the expectation of a mere outward or temporal deliverance, and to awaken the desire, as well as the hope, of a spiritual revival. This design was plainly intimated by the inferior nature of the temple which they had begun to build; for in comparison of the former it was as nothing, nor had they any ground whatever to expect that it was ever to approach the first in magnificence and splendour. And yet far more glorious things were foretold by Haggai and Zechariah of this second temple than had ever been spoken of the former,—things which could not be fulfilled except in a spiritual sense, and in consequence of the personal presence there of Messiah, the Son of God, himself. And the subsequent revelations made to the prophet were in accordance with this intimation. These revelations did, indeed, promise a temporal deliverance, and a certain measure also of worldly prosperity; for it was necessary to the accomplishment of God's purposes and promises concerning Christ, that

the Jews should be preserved as a nation, separate from the rest of the world, till Christ came. But though the blessings promised in these visions were expressed in language that was descriptive of temporal good things, and though such good things were included, yet it seems obvious that the chief consolation by which the prophet sought to comfort the people of God was the prospect of a revival of vital godliness,—the promise of spiritual prosperity to the Church. This was especially so in the case of the vision recorded in the preceding chapter, where the people of God were comforted and encouraged, not by the promise that their new temple and its services would be outwardly as magnificent as the former had been, but by presenting to them the high priest Joshua standing before the Lord with acceptance, whereby an assurance was given, that to them also the way of an acceptable approach to God was laid open; and while provision was thus made, through the ordinance of the priesthood, for immediately imparting to them spiritual consolation, their hopes and expectations were carried forward to Christ, in whom was to be fulfilled all that was typified by that ordinance.

And as the revelation made to the prophet in the preceding chapter did very fully set forth Christ's work as the great High Priest of his people, reconciling them to God by one offering of himself; so the vision in the chapter before us presents a very full and impressive view of the work of the Holy Spirit, in his gathering in and building up the Church of God. The divine influence by which the Spirit accomplishes this work is set forth by the very significant symbol of oil. The prophet "looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof." And that this vision was designed to represent the enlightening, purifying, and comforting influence of the Spirit in the Church is expressly declared; for, in reply to the prophet's question, "What are these?" the angel answered, "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." And afterwards, towards the close of this chapter, in answer to a more particular question respecting the two olive-trees, the angel said unto him, "These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth;" obviously meaning,

I think, the kingly and priestly offices, by means of which the Spirit carried on his gracious work in and on behalf of the Church, and which did themselves prefigure or typify Christ, of whom we find it foretold in a subsequent chapter, that he should be "a priest upon his throne,"—that is, the true priest and the true king of his Church. Such was the explanation which was given to the prophet of the vision generally, as setting forth the Spirit's work in regard to the Church. But he was told, at the same time, that the operation of this divine power was to be exemplified in the removal of those obstacles which had hitherto obstructed the rebuilding of the temple. The chief of these obstacles, indeed the great, and, I might almost say, the only one, was the jealousy or suspicion of the king of Persia, awakened by the misrepresentations of the enemies of the Jews; and the power of the Spirit of God was to be manifested in turning the king's heart as a rivulet of water. The gracious purpose of thus exemplifying the power of the Spirit was, in the first instance, to minister comfort to the Church of that time; for the restoration of the temple, though not in all its former magnificence and splendour, was still essential to the enjoyment by the people of God of their spiritual privileges. But there was another and a still more important purpose to be accomplished, by showing that the temple was to be finished by the interposition of a divine power. The temple itself was a type of the Church, the true spiritual temple in which God dwells; and, therefore, the restoration of the material temple at Jerusalem by the operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of those who had the power either to retard or forward it, was at once a type and a pledge that the Spirit would carry on and perfect the great work of gathering in and building up Christ's redeemed people. Meanwhile, the Jews were assured that the temple, about which they had begun to despair, would assuredly be completed,—not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. It will be recollected, that on the death of one of the kings of Persia, who had commanded the building to cease, the Jews had applied to Darius, the new sovereign, appealing to the decree of Cyrus, under which they had begun to build about fifteen years before; and it would appear that it was about this period that the prophet Zechariah was sent with

the message to Zerubbabel here recorded,—assuring him that a decree had gone forth in his favour which no authority on earth could reverse, and that an agency was at work on his behalf which no opposition could resist: "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it..... The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you."

The sequel of this interesting history, containing the fulfilment of the promise, is short, and the inference to be deduced from it very obvious. The Jews, animated with new courage, resumed their labours in the face of all opposition; and the result of their application to Darius testified that the counsels of the king of Persia had been controlled by a higher power than any earthly influence. That monarch revived, in all its fulness, the decree of Cyrus in favour of the Jews. The governor of the provinces, whom the Samaritans had laboured to prejudice against them, was commanded to let the work of the house of God alone, and to let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build the house of God in his place. A decree was passed, that out of the king's goods,—even of the tribute beyond the river,—forthwith, expenses should be given unto these men, that they might not be hindered. It was commanded, that whatever they might require for sacrifices and burnt-offerings to the God of heaven, according to the appointment of the priests which were at Jerusalem, should be furnished to them, day by day, without fail; and the decree concluded with solemnly forbidding all, on pain of death, to interfere with the execution of the king's command, or to molest or hinder the Jews in their undertaking. The opposition with which Zerubbabel had so long struggled was thus effectually put down. The very men who had been so successful in opposing him were not only obliged to desist from their opposition, but compelled to contribute to the accomplishment of a work which they flattered themselves had been for ever abandoned; and the prediction of the prophet, delivered in circumstances the

most discouraging, was literally fulfilled. Before Zerubbabel the great mountain became a plain,—by his hands the foundation of the house had been laid, and by his hands it was finished. And how strikingly does this simple narrative of facts illustrate the declaration in the passage before us, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts!"

It is possible, indeed, that if the secret counsels or personal motives of the king of Persia had been fully laid open to our view, we might find some dictate of worldly policy or some selfish consideration that would appear to us sufficient to explain his favourable decree on behalf of the Jews, and to account for his having resisted the solicitations of their adversaries against them. But what would such a disclosure amount to, but just a more striking testimony to the supremacy of Him whose purposes are steadily making their way towards their accomplishment through all the mazes of human policy and all the opposition of human power,—who, without infringing on the responsibility which men feel themselves to be under, bends their most stubborn and rebellious affections to the furtherance and fulfilment of his own counsels,—in whose hand are the hearts of kings, to turn them as rivers of water whithersoever he will,—who destroyeth the wisdom of the wise, and bringeth to nothing the understanding of the prudent? The most intimate acquaintance with the policy of Darius would only present to us the agency of the Spirit of God in a more mysterious and sublime light. To this agency of the Spirit Zerubbabel and his brethren willingly attributed all their success, and gratefully acknowledged its quickening influence on themselves, and its persuasive efficacy on the heart of Darius; for we are told in the book of Ezra that "the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo," —and that, having furnished the temple, they "kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." Nay, as if to place the interposition of the Spirit of the Lord in a still clearer light, Darius himself is constrained indirectly to acknowledge it; for, heathen though he was, and engaged as he must have been in concerns vastly more

momentous, in his estimation, than that of redressing the grievances of a distant and despised people, he virtually confessed that there was in his mind a deep, though perhaps inexplicable feeling of awe for the power of the God of Israel. This feeling we find him virtually expressing in the very proclamation which he issued in favour of the Jews; for when he there commanded that they should be furnished, day by day, with all that was required for the service of the temple at Jerusalem, he declared that he did so for this purpose,—that they might have wherewithal to "offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." In all this, we have the most luminous commentary on the words we are considering,—the clearest and most palpable evidence that the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem was indeed effected, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts.

But the temple at Jerusalem, as I have already remarked, was but the type of a still more glorious temple,—the Church of Christ,—the whole body of his redeemed people; and the erection of the material temple was symbolical of the conversion and spiritual regeneration of sinners. This truth is frequently stated in Scripture. Believers are spoken of, in their collective capacity, as a temple, or spiritual house, of which every individual is a lively stone. They are called "God's building,"—a habitation for the Holy Ghost to dwell in; and they are said to be "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, ... for an habitation of God through the Spirit." It were easy, indeed, to show that the many glorious things which Zechariah, and the other Old Testament prophets, spoke concerning the temple at Jerusalem, were spoken mainly with a reference to this spiritual temple, the Church of Christ, and were prophetical of the progress of the great work of converting and sanctifying sinners, and its consummation in their being brought together in a state of glory. This is specially obvious of what Zechariah foretold of the second temple, to the rebuilding of which the words we are now considering did more immediately refer. And if, even in regard to the type,—the building of the material temple,—the work was accomplished only by the interposition

of a divine power, how truly may it be said of the spiritual temple, the restoration of men from the ruin of the fall, that it is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts!

The passage before us, then, does very emphatically assert, what is elsewhere clearly taught in Scripture, the doctrine of the Spirit's work in converting and sanctifying sinners,—or, as it is figuratively expressed, erecting a living temple, to be an eternal monument of redeeming grace and power; and the circumstances to which we have already adverted in the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem may be considered as shadowing forth the great work of erecting the spiritual house, in its progress, in the opposition which is made to it, and in the removal of that opposition. This work has been in progress, and has advanced, with apparently more or less rapidity, towards its consummation, from the time of man's apostasy till the present hour. The divine purpose of erecting a temple, for the habitation of his own glory, out of the ruins of man's fallen nature, was announced to man immediately upon his fall. The execution of this purpose very soon began to be visibly manifested in the faith and holiness of Abel, who was the first martyr for the truth; and in every successive age, there were those to be found who, like Abel, became living stones in the spiritual temple. The progress of this work, indeed, has not always been equally rapid. At one period the means of carrying it on may have appeared to diminish, and at another the difficulties that stood in the way of its progress may have seemed greatly to multiply; and there may be found, in the history of the Church, seasons of spiritual darkness, of which we might be disposed to conclude that the work was almost or altogether abandoned.

But dark and desolate as the moral aspect of the world may often have been, and destitute as it may have appeared to be of that living principle which animates and pervades the temple of God,—the Church, the collective body of true believers,—we are forbidden to believe that it was ever at any period utterly given up to a state of spiritual desertion. Amidst the growing ungodliness and profligacy which terminated in the destruction of the old world, Enoch was found walking with God. When that terrible visitation of the divine displeasure did arrive, Noah was

found faithful and upright in his generation. When a second apostasy had again involved in ignorance and idolatry the descendants of those who had experienced so striking an interposition of divine mercy, amidst the utter destruction of the rest of mankind, Abraham was selected to furnish the clearest manifestation which had yet been given of God's purpose to rear a spiritual temple, to the praise of the glory of his grace. Moses was raised up and eminently honoured as an instrument in carrying forward the execution of that purpose, at a time when the oppressive tyranny of a heathen power was threatening the utter overthrow of the cause of God. Prophets and apostles were successively commissioned to carry forward the work, which, though apparently often retarded, has never been relinquished; and every subsequent age has witnessed the gradual progress of the scheme, for the furtherance of which so many wonders have already been wrought, and about which so many promises have been given and are yet to be fulfilled. Whatever, therefore, may be the aspect which the moral world has at any time presented, to whatever extent iniquity has abounded, or in whatever forms of aggravated depravity it may have appeared, we know that, even out of ruin apparently the most irretrievable, materials have been drawn for adding another and another living stone to the spiritual house. And whatever difficulties may be thrown in its way, the fabric will be completed,—however feeble may be the instruments employed, the great mountain will become a plain before them,—and the time will come when the great Master Builder himself "shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

We cannot look at the materials out of which this spiritual temple is reared,—namely, the fallen and ruined children of men,—without seeing that the work has been begun, and will be carried on and completed, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. But the necessity of the Spirit's operation, as the only effectual agency in this great work, will appear still more obvious, when we bear in mind that the work has always been, and still is carried on against the most determined and unceasing opposition. And I would advert, in the first instance, to the opposition that is outward and visible,—palpable to the senses of all who will observe it. And every age has fur-

nished examples of such opposition in abundance; for I might just ask, how the world has generally received and treated those who, having themselves become the subjects of redeeming and sanctifying grace, have been honoured to be employed as instruments in the spiritual regeneration of others, and who have been the most disinterested, self-denied, and devoted in the work to which they were called. To all who are conversant with Scripture, and in any degree acquainted with the history of the Church subsequently to apostolic times, the question will suggest facts in abundance to show that in every age a determined, and frequently a fierce hostility has been maintained against the instruments of God's gracious purposes towards guilty men. Where, in fact, has opposition to any thing ever assumed so ferocious an aspect, as when an ungodly world has arrayed itself in hostility to the accredited messengers of God, bearing to that very world a message of mercy? Or when has human nature appeared so utterly devoid of all those virtuous dispositions and amiable qualities which are sometimes claimed for it, as in the atrocities which it has perpetrated against the very men who have sought to raise it from degradation and misery? Many, indeed, are the acts of cruelty which the history of unregenerate men has recorded, and many the scenes of suffering in which they have involved one another, to satiate the lust of power, or gratify pride and ambition.

But if the question were asked, where the human heart has exhibited its enmity in the darkest colours, and who the persons are who have been most frequently treated as the enemies of their fellow-men, and the offscouring of all things,—should we not refer to the persecution and sufferings of the saints? Should we not tell how prophets, and evangelists, and apostles died? Should we not refer to the history of all who have been most eminent and most zealous as instruments in building up the spiritual temple of the living God? Above all, should we not appeal to the reception which the Son of God himself met with from the world, to which he had come to offer salvation through his own blood? And if such has been the enmity which the servants of God, those who have been employed in building up his Church, have encountered in the world, and if the Church itself has always hitherto been but a small flock, why is it that a race

so despised and persecuted has not long ago been utterly extinct? how is it that they have been enabled so long to maintain a conflict against such fearful odds as the overwhelming majority of an unregenerate world? and from what cause is it that the work in which they are engaged has not been abandoned? To this question there is but one answer. The Lord himself has undertaken to build up Zion; the instruments which he employs are his own workmanship, and, while he sees meet to employ them, are under his special protection; his adversaries are numerous, but they can neither frustrate his counsel nor successfully resist his power; and however discouraging may be the prospects of his people, the message to them is still the same as it was to the prince of the house of Judah: "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

In these general views of the opposition which the building up of Christ's Church has experienced, all professing Christians will readily acquiesce; for they are matters of history,—indisputable facts. But though the open and active enmity to the truth, which we have now been considering, does assuredly present a lamentable picture of the depravity and infatuation of our fallen nature; yet from all this we should form but a very imperfect estimate of that enmity, if we did not take into account the secret, the unseen resistance, which the truth has met with in every human heart, even where it has ultimately prevailed. That such an opposition exists, and that it far exceeds any human agency to soften or subdue it, will be readily admitted by all in whose heart it has really been subdued. Others may be disposed, perhaps, to deny that there is any such enmity or dislike in their hearts to God and to divine things, and may not, therefore, really believe though they admit in words, that the agency of the Holy Spirit is necessary to subdue them unto the faith and obedience of the truth; yet, if they have been conversant with the Word of God, and accustomed to associate with those who truly believe and live under the power of that Word, they can hardly have escaped such impressions or convictions at times as were sufficient, if carefully cherished and reflected on, to show them that there is a very strong and deep-rooted dislike in their minds to what is really spiritual and holy. They may hear, and

assent without difficulty to general expositions of Scripture doctrine, and may even be pleased with the manner of these expositions. But have they not felt a certain uneasiness and disquietude,—something like impatience at least, if not irritation,—when the Word has been brought to bear so directly upon their conscience as to discern and reveal to themselves the thoughts and intents of their hearts? They may esteem, and even admire and love, what is amiable in the character of a devout believer; and they may find pleasure in his society, so long as he holds converse with them on subjects of a general or indifferent kind. But do they not begin to feel something repulsive about him the moment he speaks like one in earnest about spiritual things, and seeks to engage them on topics that do most nearly concern the state of their own soul? Do they not feel, at the termination of an interview like this, as if they had been relieved from a most irksome restraint, or had made their escape from an atmosphere in which they could not freely breathe? And are they not conscious that the frequent repetition of such an attempt to press spiritual and eternal things on their attention would soon become offensive to them, beyond their power of endurance? In these, and in various other ways, men might discover, if they were willing, that there is in their minds an aversion to divine things, which no human agency ever could overcome. They may allege, indeed, that in the exercise of their own will they can examine any thing which is presented to them as truth, and embrace or reject it, according as it is or is not established by evidence to their satisfaction. But they are not aware that the bondage or perversion of their will is the very strength of the resistance which they make to the admission of the truth into their heart,—that it is their very guiltiness that they will not be converted and turn to God. It is this perversion of the will that does most clearly show the necessity of the Spirit's agency in the work of conversion, just as it was necessary to turn the heart of the king of Persia unto the Jews of old. The sublimest view which has been given us of his work is that in which he is represented as making his people willing in the day of his power. And it is true of every case of conversion, that it is wrought, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts.

If, then, the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit is necessary to turn the heart from sin to holiness, how momentous to every man should be the question, whether he has experienced that operation! Yet I fear it is a question which multitudes are but too willing to evade. Among professing Christians, though unconverted men, the general doctrine of the Spirit's agency may be readily admitted; and they may hear, not only with patience, but with some degree of gratification, of his going forth over the ruins of a fallen and sinful world, as in the beginning he moved on the face of the waters, and of his raising out of these ruins a living temple for a habitation of God, to remain an eternal monument of his redeeming grace and power. In such a subject, as a matter of mere opinion and speculation, there may be much to please the taste or gratify the fancy. But men will feel very differently when the question comes to be, whether they have experienced the Spirit's transforming power,—whether they are conscious of any thing that indicates his operation on their hearts,—whether they have any definite and reasonable ground to believe that they are in Christ, and have become new creatures. They may be unwilling to entertain the question; but if so, is not this very unwillingness an alarming symptom of their being still in an unregenerate state? If, however, the question is disturbing them, if they find it difficult to dismiss it, and if, when they do, it returns again and disquiets them, may it not be the Spirit striving with them? May not their present uneasiness be the last effort of the carnal mind to resist the truth? If they will but now entertain the subject, may not the Spirit be ready to let in upon their soul light, and life, and consolation, and peace? May not this be the very day of his power, in which they are to become a willing people? And after many, very many days of resistance to his gracious influence, may they not have to remember this as the period when there was wrought in them that great work, which is not by power, nor by might, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts?

With regard to those who have already experienced the converting, sanctifying, and comforting influence of the Spirit, being made partakers of everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, every day will be a new call to them to improve the grace which they have already received, not only by giving all dili-

gence to make their own calling and election sure, but by renewed diligence in labouring for the spiritual well-being of others. From the day that they themselves were quickened to spiritual life, and came under that purifying influence whereby they are fitted for occupying a place as living stones in God's spiritual house, they desired to become fellow-workers together with him in building that house,—in bringing others to the knowledge and faith of the truth as it is in Jesus. And while such must be their strong desire still, and, in divine strength, their resolution, they will be more careful also to bear in mind, —what is so forcibly brought before them by the words of this passage,—their absolute dependence on the Spirit's agency for all the success which may follow their efforts. But it does, also, bring before them, for their encouragement, the unspeakable importance of prayer as a duty, and its inestimable value as a privilege; for if the Spirit's work be indispensable for the conversion of every individual sinner, how helpless would believers feel themselves to be, if they were not permitted directly to pray that he would graciously own and bless their labours! And if they are not only permitted, but encouraged, nay, commanded so to pray, how cheerful, how persevering, and how full of hope should all their labours be! Whatever be the outward means which are placed within their reach, and the opportunities of employing these which may be afforded them,—however skilfully and scripturally they may use these means, and however careful to embrace every opportunity of so using them,—they will prove utterly impotent if unaccompanied by the agency of the Holy Ghost; and when believers, therefore, in their collective capacity as a portion of the Church of Christ, have constructed and put into operation a system of outward means for building up the spiritual temple, what can they do but betake themselves to prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to give life and energy to his own ordinances? And while so engaged, how nearly are all believers placed on a level in regard to privilege! Some may be far inferior to others in the gifts and in the worldly means whereby they might serve God in furthering his cause; but how greatly superior may they not be in fervent, persevering, believing prayer! And who can estimate the extent to which the labours of the Church at large have been blessed, in answer

to such prayers on the part of the humblest and most obscure members? And if prayer is alike the privilege of all God's people, so it is a privilege which may at all times be enjoyed; and if the Church be in a spiritually healthy state, it will be the daily exercise of her believing members to acknowledge their own helplessness, and to pray for that success of their labours which cometh not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts.

LXVII.

"HE SHALL BE A PRIEST UPON HIS THRONE."

ZECHARIAH VI. 12, 13.

THE leading object of the prophet in the first four chapters, as we have already seen, was to comfort and encourage the believing portion of the Jews,—those who formed the true Church,—in the depressing circumstances in which they found themselves placed on their return from captivity. They had begun to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem ; but, in their weak and impoverished condition, they had no prospect of being able so to restore the house of God as that, in magnificence and splendour, it could be at all compared with that which Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed. This itself was sufficiently discouraging, even though they had been permitted peaceably to finish the work which they had begun. This, however, they were not allowed to do ; for, by the machinations of the people of the land, the descendants of the heathen who had been settled there when Israel was carried into captivity, a decree was procured from the king of Persia forbidding the Jews to proceed with the work of rebuilding the temple. This prohibition continued in force for about thirteen years ; and so depressed were even the devout and godly of the Jews, that when it was withdrawn, and permission was given them to proceed with their work, they manifested but little inclination to resume their labour. In these circumstances, the prophet Haggai was sent to them, at once to reprove and to encourage them,—to rebuke their unbelieving fears, and to comfort them

under their penitential sorrow. With him Zechariah was associated, who, in the first instance, addressed himself mainly to the truly humble and devout of his brethren,—those who, though chargeable with some degree of unbelief, and consequent want of zeal, were, at the same time, deeply afflicted and cast down on account of their sins as the procuring cause of the disappointments which they had experienced, and the difficulties which they had to encounter. He accordingly assured all such, that the work in which they were engaged, and which had been so long interrupted, should certainly be accomplished,—that as the hands of Zerubbabel had laid the foundations of the house, so his hands should finish it; and he, at the same time, foretold, as Haggai had done, the coming of Messiah, whose appearance was to render the second house far more glorious than the former had ever been.

But while the godly among the Jews thus required consolation and encouragement, it appears that there were many who from the first had looked only for temporal prosperity on their return from captivity, and, on being disappointed, surrendered themselves still more eagerly to the pursuits of worldliness, seeking to make the most of their condition, utterly regardless of the restoration of the temple and the spiritual prosperity of the Church. In their ungodliness, the prophet saw the germ of that degeneracy which was one day to become all but universal,—which was to lead to the rejection of the Messiah when he did appear,—and which was to terminate in a second destruction of Jerusalem, and a second dispersion of the people, unspeakably more calamitous than what had befallen them at the Babylonish captivity. All this was revealed to the prophet in a vision, as related in the 5th chapter, in which he saw a woman, named Wickedness, placed in an ephah,—which was the largest vessel of measure used among the Jews,—and carried away into the land of Shinar; intimating that the time would come, when the people of the Jews, having filled up the measure of their iniquity, should be visited with the full measure of the divine judgment,—or, as the apostle has expressed it, wrath should come upon them to the uttermost, —and they should be carried into the land of Shinar,—that is, dispersed or sent into captivity, Shinar, as the country towards which they had formerly been carried captive, being employed to signify dispersion or captivity generally. And this vision was

followed by another, in which the prophet saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains of brass, and going forth, two towards the north, and one towards the south, and one through the earth generally.

The valley from which the prophet saw the four chariots coming forth is supposed by commentators to be the valley of Jehoshaphat, by Jerusalem, which we find expressly mentioned, in a similar manner, in a subsequent chapter of this book. It is represented as the place from which the ministers of God's purposes were to go forth, because it was immediately under the mount on which stood the temple, the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory; and the mountains on either side are represented as mountains of brass, intimating that the wall of protection which God has reared around his Church is impregnable. The import of the prediction, then, is, that after the second destruction of Jerusalem, and the second dispersion of the Jews, as foretold in the preceding vision, and which took place after their rejection of Christ, there was to go forth from Jerusalem,—that is, from him who had condescended to make Jerusalem his dwelling-place,—a command to execute judgments on the other nations of the earth,—judgments which were to terminate in the subjugation of the whole world unto the Lord. And having thus foretold, for the warning of his hypocritical countrymen, the disasters which would one day come upon Jerusalem and the Jews, and predicted, for the encouragement of God's people, the judgments which should certainly overtake the enemies of the Church, the prophet resumes the subject which he had been setting forth in the preceding chapters, namely, the completion of the temple, and the coming of Him in whose appearing that temple, though greatly inferior in outward magnificence and splendour to the first, was to be adorned with surpassing glory: "Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH!"

Of the various predictions in which the prophet Zechariah, as well as Haggai, foretold Christ, we have a very interesting and instructive one in the passage before us. There we find Messiah set forth, both typically, and in express prophetical language,—the one, indeed, being an explanation of the other. When the prophet was commanded to "take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Jose-

dech, the high priest," there was presented to the people a type of Christ in his kingly office, as Joshua and his fellows, the priests, had previously been set forth as a type of Christ in his priestly office, as recorded in the 3d chapter, "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee; for they are men wondered at,"—literally, men of wonder, that is, a sign or type,—"for, behold, I will bring forth my servant, The BRANCH." This typical representation of Christ by Joshua and his brethren the priests, who together constituted the priesthood, was very obvious and appropriate, as referring to our Lord's priestly office. But the transactions recorded in the passage before us, wherein a crown was placed upon the head of Joshua, might appear to the Jews of less obvious import. Joshua was of the tribe of Levi, while the royal power was lodged in the tribe of Judah, and restricted to the house of David. But it is this very circumstance which gives peculiar significancy to the type, whereby it expresses in the most emphatic manner the leading truth which the prophet was instructed to set before the people of God, namely, the union of the priestly and kingly offices in the person of Christ. The prophet, accordingly, proceeds to express or explain in words the import of the symbolical act which he had just performed in setting a crown on the head of Joshua; and as if to set forth the completeness of the type exhibited in the high priest wearing the crown, the badge of royalty, he addresses Joshua, as if Messiah, whom Joshua typified, had been actually present: "Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord, even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

In this very full and striking prediction of the glorious person and work of Messiah, the first thing that demands our attention is the name or title by which he is here designated: "Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH." To the Jews this was no new name, as applied to a great deliverer. It had been employed repeatedly in the same way by Jeremiah, a prophet with whose predictions the restored captives may be supposed to have been familiar, inasmuch as he had not only with peculiar preci-

sion foretold, but also witnessed the captivity, and had, moreover, predicted its duration of seventy years, and the restoration of the captives at the end of that period. We find this prophet, then, applying the name "Branch" to one who could be no other than Messiah. Thus, in the 23d chapter at the 5th verse, he says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." The same prediction is repeated, and almost in the same words, in the 33d chapter. And as this was the title whereby the Messiah was foretold for the consolation of the Church, immediately before the great calamity overtook her, when Jerusalem and the temple were laid in ruins, and the king, the representative of the house of David, as well as the people, was carried into captivity, so God was graciously pleased to strengthen the hands and encourage the hearts of his people on their return from their captivity, by renewing to them, in the same terms, the prediction which, we may well believe, had kept alive their faith and hope during their sojourn in a strange land, while they hanged their harps on the willows by the rivers of Babylon.

But Christ had been foretold by the same title at a much earlier period, and in such a way as to explain the meaning and show the appropriateness of the name "Branch." In the 11th chapter of Isaiah, at the beginning, the prophet says, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." And then, after such a description of the blessings of Messiah's kingdom as will be fully realised only in the glory of the latter day, he repeats the prediction in the 10th verse, "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious." This prophecy plainly intimates that the external glory of the house of David or Jesse would to all appearance pass away,—that it would be as a tree cut down, leaving only the root in the ground; but that then, when ap-

parently decayed and ready to die, there would spring from it a shoot or Branch which should grow up, and infinitely surpass in grandeur and beauty all that it had ever been before, providing not only shelter for the dispersed of Judah and the outcasts of Israel, but a dwelling-place for all nations, that they might abide under the shadow thereof. And need I remark how literally this prediction was fulfilled, when the royal house of David came to be represented in the person of the humble and lowly Mary, of the obscure city of Nazareth, and when it was announced to her regarding her Son, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end?"

And need I remind believers of the assurance thus given of the fulfilment in due time of all the glorious things which Isaiah foretold of Christ's kingdom, when the root of Jesse "shall stand for an ensign of the people;" when "to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious." The leading truth intended to be set forth by foretelling Messiah under the title of the Branch was the lowly condition in which he was to appear,—the humble beginning of that dispensation which, according to the whole tenor of prophecy from the beginning, was infinitely to surpass in glory all previous manifestations of the divine character in his dealings with men. And what could be more consoling than such a prediction to the Church of Zechariah's time, newly delivered from her captivity, but still cast down in spirit, because of the little prospect which she had of the revival of the former glory of Jerusalem and the temple, and ready, therefore, if not to despise the day of small things, at least to despond because they were small? And how full of encouragement still to the Church to reflect, amidst much that might discourage and depress her, that so it has been always,—that the beginning of all the divine interpositions on behalf of his people has been a day of small things,—and that when Christ himself appeared, he grew up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he had no form or comeliness, and when men saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him! But it is thus that God has especially glorified his great name, as he has himself declared by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, who, in the 17th

chapter of his prophecies, foretold Messiah under a similar figure to that which we have been considering: "Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it."

Having thus foretold the lowly condition in which Messiah was to appear,—the obscurity out of which he was to grow up,—the prophet proceeds to set forth the glorious achievement which was to be the object of his appearing, and in language peculiarly appropriate, as addressed to Joshua and the Jews in the circumstances in which they were then placed: "Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place," or, "out of his ground," "and he shall build the temple of the Lord." It will be recollected that the Church of Christ, his redeemed people, viewed collectively, or as one body, are frequently represented in Scripture under the figure of an house or building, each believer, individually, being a stone in that building. "Upon this rock," said our Lord to Peter, "I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Ye are "of the household of God," says the apostle to the Ephesians; "and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." In like manner, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle says of Christ: "For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. . . . . And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house

are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." And the apostle Peter thus describes the honour and privileges which believers enjoy: Coming to Christ, "as unto a lively stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

This, then, was the spiritual temple which the prophet foretold that the Messiah was to build. It had already begun, indeed, to be erected, even from the moment that one of the sinful children of men became a child of God by faith in the promised Saviour,—the Seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head,—and every believer, of every subsequent age, formed a lively stone in that temple. But when Messiah appeared, not only was that building to proceed more palpably, as well as more rapidly than it had before done, but it was to be made manifest that the builder and maker thereof was God,—even God manifest in the flesh. And, accordingly, it is spoken of in the passage before us as if altogether a future work, as if confined to the time of Messiah. But so the prophets were wont to represent Christ's kingdom, whatever might be the figure which they employed for setting it forth, intimating that all the glory of former dispensations would be as nothing compared with the glory of the latter days. And so it is emphatically, as well as most appropriately expressed in the figurative language of the passage we are considering,—language which, to the spiritually-minded among the Jews, those who had some right apprehension of the nature of Messiah's kingdom, must have been peculiarly expressive and significant. The object which at that time engrossed their thoughts and awakened their anxieties was the restoration of the temple,—that holy house which had of old been the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory, and from which their fathers had received tokens of the divine favour and assurances of the divine protection. On account of the long desolation of that house, the difficulties which had stood in the way of their restoring it, and the lowly nature of the building itself, even when it should be restored, they were sorrowful and cast down; and to animate and encourage them, amidst the opposition with which they had to contend, the prophet was instructed to say, "The hands of

Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you." But this was a small part of the consolation which he was commissioned to impart to his devout and believing brethren. As if adapting his prediction to the circumstances in which they were placed,—as if availing himself of the ideas and feelings which were at the moment predominant in their minds,—he directed their views forward to Messiah's time, and set forth before them Messiah's work, under the figure of building a temple,—a temple of which he emphatically declared, that the building in which they were so anxiously engaged was but a type, a shadowy representation: "Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; .... he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne." In any circumstances, the figure thus employed to foretell Christ's work must have conveyed a very exalted idea of it to the Jews who lived subsequently to the time at which the temple at Jerusalem became the glory of their country, and was associated in their minds with all the privileges which they enjoyed, and with all the blessings which they hoped for. But at the time this prediction was delivered, it must have been peculiarly impressive, and calculated to awaken very exalted, as well as very animating conceptions of the person, and character, and undertaking of the Messiah.

But now that we can read the prediction and its fulfilment also in the same inspired volume,—now that we have the New Testament commentaries on the passage before us,—with what solemn awe, as well as admiration, should it not fill our minds! To us the building of a temple, as representing Christ's work, is no longer a typical representation, in which, however plainly it be set forth, there is still something obscure. It is now a great reality. If we are, in deed and in truth, what we profess to be, believers in Christ, then the spiritual temple here spoken of is not merely a glorious object, a trophy of the Redeemer's grace and power, on which we may as onlookers stand and gaze with admiration, but a temple of which we ourselves form a part. If we really are believers, we are all and each of us lively, or living, stones in that temple. We are now under the hand of the great Master Builder, who is fashioning and polishing us for the places which

we are to occupy in his spiritual house. And surely when we reflect on what we originally were before we became the subjects of this divine operation, when we remember the rock whence we are hewn, and the hole of the pit whence we are digged, we can hardly fail to be conscious of the change which we have already undergone,—we ought to be sensible, as a matter of experience, of the transformation which we still continue to undergo. Surely we ought not to rest satisfied without such experience, nor hastily or on light grounds conclude that we are believers. And if we have that experience,—if we have good ground to believe that we have come to the living stone, the sure foundation which God has laid in Zion,—may it not be expected that we shall be reconciled to the transforming and beautifying process through which we may have to pass, painful though at times it may be, seeing we are thereby "built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ."

And if the nature of Christ's work, as here foretold, is revealed to us as it was not and could not be to the restored Jewish captives, so the manner in which he fulfilled that work has also been divested of all the obscurity which to their eye must have attached to it. Even to them, indeed, the prediction must have added largely to the knowledge which preceding types and prophecies had furnished concerning the work of the Messiah. It did not only assure them that he should bear the glory, or be invested with royal majesty, and sit and rule upon his throne. This assurance had been frequently, and sometimes very expressively given to the Church before, as, for example, when Isaiah foretold of Messiah, that "the government" should be "upon his shoulder," and that "of the increase of his government and peace" there should be "no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, even for ever." But the passage says more than this. It declares of him, "He shall be a priest upon his throne." In these few words there was a summary of all former predictions concerning the character which Messiah was to sustain, and the offices which he was to execute, in effecting the deliverance of his people; and they furnish, moreover, an explanation of much that might have appeared dark and mysterious in these predictions,—especially the condition of abasement and

suffering, and the state of glory and honour, in which the prophets had alternately represented him,—the marvellous combination of lowliness and majesty which his character represented as delineated in the Scriptures. How far the Church, the true Israel, to whom these words were addressed, were enabled to apply them in the interpretation of former prophecies, we cannot determine. They must, at least, have perceived that the priestly and kingly offices, which had formerly been held by different individuals, and were at that moment executed by Joshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel the representative of the house of David, were to be vested in the person of Messiah, and that he, therefore, who was to rule over and defend his people was to transact also with God on their behalf, as the high priest had been wont to do, making reconciliation for the sins of the people.

But to us, who have seen the fulfilment of the prediction, how full of meaning should be the few and simple words, "He shall be a priest upon his throne!" While they unfold to us the treasures of the Old Testament Scriptures, how comprehensively do they sum up, and how emphatically do they express, the doctrines of the New Testament concerning the work of Christ! There is here represented to us the glorious combination of offices which constitutes the foundation of all our hopes,—the strength of all our consolation. While they point backward to Melchisedec,—that clearest, as he was one of the earliest types of Christ,—they direct us forward to the great Antitype, of whom they give us a description, as remarkable for its fulness and precision as for its brevity. Melchisedec, as his name implies, was king of righteousness, and in that character he might have been eminently a type of Him who is described as a King who should reign in righteousness, and should execute judgment and justice in the earth. In that character alone, however, he typified nothing that could furnish any ground of hope to the guilty; for what could the guilty look for under the government of such a king but the execution of judgment,—the infliction of merited wrath? But Melchisedec was also the priest of the Most High God; and in virtue of his priesthood he was king, also, of Salem,—that is, king of peace. And so it is in virtue of Christ's priesthood that he bears the glory, and sits and rules upon his throne. As God, indeed, the throne of

the universe was his,—his the inalienable prerogative to rule over the world which he had made. But it is to a mediatorial throne that he has been, or indeed could be exalted; for it was only as Mediator,—as God-man,—that he could admit of exaltation. Having, in his priestly office, made reconciliation for the sins of his people, power has been given him "over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many" as the Father had given him. As Mediator, his right to rule was purchased by the execution of his priestly office, wherein, as at once the priest and the sacrifice, he fulfilled the conditions of the eternal covenant,—satisfied the demands of divine justice,—vindicated the rectitude of the divine law,—and procured a right to every thing that was needful for the salvation of those whom he had bought with his own blood. It was because he thus "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," that God "hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name,"—even that of "a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance unto Israel, and the forgiveness of sins." It is in virtue of his priestly office, whereby "he finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness," that he is emphatically "King of Righteousness,"—the true Melchisedec,—not merely in the sense of being a righteous king, "executing judgment and justice in the earth," but as the dispenser of righteousness to his people,—even his own righteousness, which he wrought out by his obedience unto the death.

And if in this sense he be "King of Righteousness," he must also be "King of Peace;" for if he makes his people righteous, if he reconciles them to God, peace must be their portion, as the apostle expressly declares of all true believers: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." When the passage under consideration tells us, therefore, that Christ is "a priest upon his throne," it tells us every thing that is fitted to fill the hearts of his people with confidence and a sense of security; for what can they need which such a Saviour is not able and willing to do for them? His exaltation to the throne of glory is God's own testimony to his finished work,—his perfect righteousness,—his all-sufficiency as their high priest, who has shed his own blood for them,—the

blood that cleanses from all sin. And the love which prompted Christ thus to shed his blood is his own solemn pledge that the sovereignty to which he has been exalted, the authority with which he has been invested, will be exercised on their behalf, even for perfecting that which concerneth them. And when they contemplate, then, with lively faith this glorious combination of offices in the person of Christ, may they not adopt the language of the apostle, and say with confidence, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

But the security thus provided for believers by the union of the priestly and kingly offices in the person of Christ, is brought out still more fully in the concluding clause of the passage, "And the counsel of peace shall be between them both." By the counsel of peace we are to understand, I think, the counsel that was taken, the plan that was devised, for procuring peace to God's elect people,—that is, the great scheme of redeeming mercy. The word "peace" is used in the same acceptation in the 53d chapter of Isaiah, where the prophet says of Messiah, "The chastisement of our peace was upon him,"—that is, the chastisement whereby our peace with God, or our reconciliation to him, has been effected. The prophet declares, then, that the execution of this counsel of peace was to be between the two offices of king and priest, as united in the person of Christ. Under the old dispensation these offices were held by different individuals; and to the individuals so holding them was committed the administration of all the affairs of the people of Israel, as the commonwealth and as the Church; and on the harmonious co-operation of these offices, in the faithful discharge of the duties belonging to each, depended not a little the safety and prosperity of the people of God. Such was the state of things at the moment the prediction in the passage before us was delivered. Zerubbabel and Joshua were entrusted with the restoration of the temple, and the recording of all that concerned the worship of God in Jerusalem, the prophets of God, Haggai and Zechariah, helping them; and in this union of all the three great offices divinely appointed under the old economy, there was faintly

typified the work of Christ, who was to unite in himself all these offices, and from whose execution of them all former institutions derived their value and efficacy.

When the people of God are assured, then, by Christ himself, the great prophet of the Church, the faithful and the true witness, that the divine counsel of peace on their behalf,—the scheme of redemption,—which occupied the council of heaven before the world was, has been committed to him, to be wrought out or executed by him in his twofold character of priest and king, employing all the high prerogatives of both offices in harmonious co-operation for securing the fulfilment of that counsel, with what confidence may they not repose in the infallible certainty of their salvation being secured? He whose glory it is to be exalted a priest upon his throne, has been invested with these offices for the very purpose of carrying into effect that divine counsel which involved their peace. His resurrection from the dead, and his exaltation at the right hand of God, is a pledge to all who believe in him that he has finished the work which his Father gave him to do, and has infallibly secured for them that eternal life which his Father gave him power to bestow. And need I remind them that this eternal life involves in it a participation in the very glory to which he himself has been exalted? Frequently and expressly has he given them this assurance in Scripture. But never more emphatically has it been given than in reference to the subject before us. He has glorified the Father, and is himself glorified in sitting "a priest upon his throne;" and it is repeatedly declared of his redeemed people that they too shall sit upon his throne, and shall be kings and priests unto God, and that their song shall ever be, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

LXVIII.

"REJOICE GREATLY, O DAUGHTER OF ZION."

ZECHARIAH IX. 9.

It may, perhaps, appear at first sight as if this remarkable prediction concerning Christ were somewhat abruptly introduced. It will be found, however, that the representation here given of Messiah derives great significancy and force from being viewed in connection with what goes before. We are told, at the beginning of the 7th chapter, that the people of the Jews sent certain of their number to the house of God, to inquire of the priests and prophets whether they were to continue to weep in the fifth month, as they had been accustomed to do for so many years; that is, whether they were to keep the fast which they began to observe at the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and which they continued to keep during the seventy years of their captivity, as a melancholy memorial of that disastrous event. In making this inquiry, they obviously expressed a hope that now, when for two years they had been permitted, by the authority of Darius, to prosecute, without let or hindrance, the work of restoring the temple, the day which had formerly been set apart for fasting and mourning might be observed as a season of joy and gladness. In reply to the inquiry, the prophet was commanded, in the first instance, to address the worldly and hypocritical among them, of whom there were but too many, reminding them from the experience of their fathers, what, indeed, they might have learned from their own, that mere out-

ward fasting, while the heart was unhumbled, so far from being acceptable to God, was an abomination in his sight; and that as such hypocritical fasting had greatly aggravated the guilt of those who had been carried into captivity, so it was the solemn and oft-repeated declaration of God, that it would in all times be visited with his righteous judgment. But while the prophet thus rebuked and warned the formalists and false professors among his countrymen, he had a word in season also for the truly humble and downcast in spirit, and for the true Church of all subsequent times. He was commanded to assure them that the Lord "was jealous for Zion with great jealousy," as that with which the manifestation of his own glory was bound up; that he had "returned unto Zion," and would "dwell again in Jerusalem;" that days of great prosperity awaited his city and his holy mountain; and that the fast of the fifth month, and all the fasts which his people had been accustomed to observe in their captivity, and on which they humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God, would indeed be converted into good days,—even days of "joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts." This forms the subject of the 8th chapter. In the 9th chapter, the prophet goes on to foretell the judgments which were to overtake the nations, those especially which had at any time vexed and oppressed Israel,—that is, all the enemies of the Church of God. And while thus denouncing judgments on the heathen, the prophet did expressly declare, that in the midst of all these judgments the Church or people of God should remain unhurt: "I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth; and no oppression shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes;" that is, Now I behold my people, an expression frequently employed in Scripture to denote God's interposition on behalf of his people to help and deliver them.

Learned commentators and historians have endeavoured to show, and I think successfully, that this prediction of judgments upon the nations, and of a special interposition on behalf of Jerusalem, was outwardly and literally fulfilled within less than two hundred years after it was uttered. And if so, it must have served greatly to strengthen the faith of the Church in the due fulfilment of the higher, the spiritual blessings which were in-

volved in the prediction. But however this may be, there are two remarkable circumstances in this prophecy which deserve special notice. The first is, that in the execution of the divine judgments which were coming upon the heathen, the Jews were not to be employed as the instruments of that execution. Formerly they had been so employed. God was pleased to assert his sovereignty, in opposition to the false gods of the heathen, by giving his people a commission to punish the heathen for their idolatry, and by investing them with the power to execute that commission. He put the fear of them and the dread of them on all the nations that were round about them. But the judgments here threatened were to be executed, not by God's people, but by the heathen themselves on one another. The second remarkable circumstance in the prophecy before us is a plain intimation that the heathen nations, against which judgment is in the first instance denounced, were ultimately to be added to the Church of God. Thus, at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, it is said, "The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts..... Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." And again, in the 7th verse of the chapter before us, after the threatened judgments were executed, "But he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God." This gracious promise, indeed, respecting the heathen, is not peculiar to the passage before us; for it is just the prediction of the ingathering of the nations into the Church of Christ,—a prediction which is to be found in the psalms and in all the prophets. But the introduction of it here is especially appropriate in connection with the plain intimation, that the judgments which were coming upon the heathen were not to be executed, as they had formerly been, by the people of God. It was thus declared that neither the punishment of the nations, nor their ultimate subjugation to the authority of the true God, was to be the effect of temporal triumphs on the part of the Jews, like

those which they had formerly gained over the nations of Canaan. And then the prophet proceeds to foretell how this glorious consummation was to be brought about. It was to be accomplished, indeed, by a King whom the daughter of Zion might call her King; but he was to accomplish it, not by warlike enterprise and conquest, but by speaking peace to the heathen as well as to the Jews: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen; and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."

This passage, then, explains how the glorious consummation foretold in the preceding chapter, namely, the subjugation of the nations to the authority of Jehovah, was to be accomplished. And nothing, surely, could intimate more plainly than this prediction did, that the Jews were not to expect in the promised Messiah a temporal prince, under whose banner they were to achieve such temporal victories as they had formerly won under the guidance of their judges and their kings. It is obvious, indeed, that one of the great purposes of the divine dealings with the Jews after their return from Babylon was to direct their hopes and expectations to a spiritual Messiah. Though God was faithful to his promise, and, at the termination of the predicted period of seventy years, delivered them from captivity, and restored them to the land of their fathers, yet the circumstances in which they found themselves placed there afforded but little ground to hope that they were ever to become what they had formerly been, a great and a warlike people, to whom the neighbouring nations were to be brought into subjection. On the contrary, every thing in their condition forbade them to cherish any such expectations. How different was their entering again into the land of Canaan from that of their fathers, when, under the guidance of Joshua, they passed over Jordan, besieged and took Jericho, and proceeded to possess the whole land, none being able to withstand them or to arrest their progress, till their own unbelief and disobedience withered their strength, and

frequently turned the tide of battle against them. The restored captives returned to their country comparatively a mere handful in number; and so far from being able to meet powerful nations in the field, and to reconquer and possess the land, they were unable for a time to make head against the people of the land, degenerate Jews, and heathens who made a sort of profession of the Jewish faith. By these they were long vexed and harassed, partly by open hostility, and partly by secret machinations, whereby decrees were procured from the court of Persia against their rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. From all these annoyances they were, indeed, at length delivered; and between the period of which we are now speaking, and the coming of Christ, God did many wonderful things on behalf of the Jews in their collective capacity, giving them a place among the nations, and making it plain to all that among them he had still a Church, on whose behalf he would never fail to make bare his holy arm. But from the day that the Jews returned from Babylon to Judea, every thing in their condition discouraged the hope of their ever becoming what they had once been,—a people the fear of whom and the dread of whom should be on all the nations round about them.

They might, therefore, and they ought to have concluded that the many glorious things which the prophets had foretold of the Church previously to the captivity, must have referred to other and very different triumphs than those of a temporal kind, even to the conversion of heathen nations from the worship of dumb idols to the service of the living God. The three prophets, too, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who prophesied subsequently to the captivity, might have taught them so to interpret the former prophets; for the whole tenor of what these three were commissioned to declare plainly intimated that the great deliverer, who had for so many ages been looked and longed for, was a spiritual deliverer, and that they only who were spiritual could share in the glory and participate in the blessings of his kingdom. Even in regard to the temple, that which they regarded as the glory of their country, and the token of God's presence and protection, they had no ground to expect that it was ever again to be what it had formerly been, even in outward magnificence and splendour, and far less in what constituted its

true glory, namely, the presence of the cloud overshadowing the mercy-seat; for the ark of the testimony was gone, and with it the cloud of glory had departed. The prophet Haggai, indeed, foretold that the glory of the second house should be greater than that of the former. But the prediction itself, and especially when viewed in connection with the general tenor of his own and Zechariah's prophecies, plainly intimated that this glory was to consist neither in outward grandeur, nor in a symbol of the divine presence, but in the divine presence itself, even the personal appearance there of the Prince of Peace,—of him who is here foretold as the King of Zion, meek and lowly, speaking peace even to the heathen: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." At a future period, when the coming of the promised Messiah was believed to be, and really was at hand, Herod impiously imagined that he would fulfil this prophecy, and, accordingly, set himself at enormous expense to renew and beautify the temple; and, from all accounts, he succeeded in making it, as to outward grandeur, equal if not superior to the former. And, alas! he succeeded but too well, also, in the wicked purpose of strengthening the Jews in their hope of a temporal Messiah, and in their attachment to the mere outward rites and ceremonies of religion, which ultimately led to the rejection of Christ. This guilty infatuation must appear greatly aggravated by the care which, we have seen, was taken, from the time of their return from Babylon, to discourage their hope of a temporal deliverer, to wean their affections from what was outwardly imposing in their religious ordinances, and to awaken the desire and the expectation of spiritual blessings under the government of a spiritual Messiah. This was obviously the design of all that the prophets addressed to them subsequently to their restoration to their own land; and nowhere does it appear more strikingly than in the prediction of Messiah contained in the passage, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

That this prediction referred to Christ might be certainly inferred from the passage itself; for to none could such a descrip-

tion apply but to Him who was God manifest in the flesh,—the humble and lowly Jesus of Nazareth, yet the Creator and Heir of all things. But if there could be any doubt, it were removed by the simple fact that our Lord openly appropriated the prophecy to himself, by appearing literally in the very circumstances here foretold. This fact has been recorded by all the four evangelists, as if to bring more prominently into view one of those aspects of the Saviour's character, which is especially fitted to minister to the consolation and encouragement of the humble and downcast of his disciples. The evangelist Matthew tells us that our Lord, on his way to Jerusalem, being come to the Mount of Olives, sent "two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them: and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." I do not know that the blind and obstinate unbelief of the Jews was more clearly demonstrated by any event in the history of our Lord's personal ministry, than by their refusing to recognise in him the person foretold in this prophecy,—a prophecy which must have been familiar to all, especially to the scribes and Pharisees. I do not mean, of course, that the circumstance of our Lord appearing, as it had been foretold that Messiah was to appear, did of itself furnish such evidence of his being the Messiah as could not be disputed; for the Jews might contrive very plausibly to dispute it. But viewed in connection with all the other circumstances of our Lord's entering into Jerusalem on that occasion, it did afford such a clear fulfilment of the prophet's prediction as nothing short of judicial blindness could mistake or resist. I say nothing of the innumerable miracles which our Lord had previously wrought, and which should have led them to recognise in him the King foretold by the prophet. There was evidence enough, in immediate connection with his entering into Jerusalem, to convince all that he could be no other than the Prince of Peace, in whose coming the daughter of Zion had been invited to rejoice.

The evangelists inform us, that when the disciples had brought the colt to Jesus, they put on it their clothes, and they set him thereon: "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." That these expressions of joy and admiration were the dictates of a divine impulse on the minds of those who uttered them, might be inferred from the circumstances in which they were called forth; for on no other principle, I think, can it be explained how the appearance of our Lord in so lowly a condition should have awakened such lively feelings in those who must have frequently seen him, in all the majesty of omnipotence, imparting health and strength by a word. But that the multitude were under a divine impulse is very plainly declared by our Lord himself, in the replies which he made to those who were irritated, and, I believe, alarmed by what they witnessed. To "the chief priests and scribes," who "saw the wonderful things that he did, and heard the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David," and who said to him, with sore displeasure, "Hearest thou what these say?" he answered, "Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" I am very willing to believe that these children were among the number of those concerning whom our Lord said on another occasion, "Of such is the kingdom of God." But however this may be, there was another reply of our Lord, on the occasion before us, which did with equal explicitness declare that those who rejoiced on his entrance into Jerusalem, in the manner foretold by the prophet, were under a divine impulse, being taught by the Spirit of God to discern the glory of Christ as the King of Zion, to whom all the prophets had borne witness. "Some of the Pharisees," we are told, "said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." In both of these replies, our Lord distinctly asserted not only his claim to be the person foretold in this prophecy, but his divinity, and, consequently, his supreme control over all men and all

things. And if so, then this declaration of his character must have been accompanied, as on other occasions, with such a manifestation of majesty and moral greatness as filled the boldest and the bitterest of his enemies with fear and dismay. And this is not a mere inference from what we have already seen of what took place on the occasion referred to. We have direct evidence that the most inveterate of our Lord's enemies were overawed by the divine majesty and greatness which he then manifested; for we are told, that without any daring to offer opposition, he drave from the temple those who, with the connivance of the priests and scribes, had converted it into a place of ungodly traffic. " And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." And while the hypocritical and profane fled before him in terror, the humble and the afflicted sought to him for relief; for it is added, "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them." The unbelieving Jews might have been convinced, by the very dismay which seized them, that they were in the presence of one who possessed more than human power, and that he could be no other than what he declared himself to be,—even the King of Zion, whom the prophet foretold. And if they had yielded to this conviction, what a flood of light would the transaction which they witnessed have poured upon those Old Testament prophecies, which they so grievously misunderstood and perverted,—I mean, those predictions in which Messiah was foretold as at once an humble and a despised sufferer, and as a king invested with absolute and universal sovereignty! But, generally, they were not so convinced. They recovered from the terror which had for a time overwhelmed them, and with this recovery, there returned more than their former bitterness and hostility; nor did they cease to seek their revenge till they succeeded, when they crucified and slew him. There was still, however, a Church among the Jews, though weak in number, and obscure in worldly condition,—a daughter of Zion, ready to welcome and rejoice in the advent of her King; and the prediction before us was fulfilled, when the multitudes in the way, and

the children in the temple, cried out, "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!"

To what extent those who thus welcomed Christ on his entering into Jerusalem, clearly understood what they were themselves moved to say, we cannot of course determine. It is said, in reference to his disciples themselves on this very occasion, "These things understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him." We cannot doubt, therefore, that so it must have been with the multitude by the way, and with the children in the temple. But it is especially deserving of notice, that the character which they ascribed to Christ is, in substance, the same by which the prophet described him. They hailed him as "the Son of David,"—a title equivalent to that which the prophet gave him, when he foretold him as "King of Zion." And, in like manner, as the prophet foretold that he was to come to them, just, and having salvation, so they welcomed him as coming in the name of the Lord, and declared their belief that he had come bearing a message of mercy that had been proclaimed in heaven to the glory of God. "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." And does not this representation of Christ's character, and of the purpose of his coming, comprehend every thing that is needful to give us the assurance of his all-sufficiency as a Saviour,—of his power and of his willingness to save? The proclamation delivered by the prophet, and taken with joy and gladness by those who witnessed the Lord's advent, was designed for the daughter of Zion,—the Church in all subsequent times: and to believers in these last days it is still more full of instruction, and more rich in consolation, than it was to the Church in our Lord's time, inasmuch as the meaning of it is now unfolded, with a clearness and a fulness unknown even to the apostles themselves, until their Master had suffered, and had risen again from the dead. Christ is here described as just,—that is, declared to be righteous. To be righteous is to have fulfilled all the requirements of the divine law, to the full satisfaction of the Lawgiver. But what was the righteousness which Christ was re-

quired to fulfil when he came in the name of the Lord to Zion, his Church? It was to satisfy the demands which the divine law had against the children of men as guilty transgressors of that law,—first, the demand of perfect obedience, and that not having been rendered, an atonement for the guilt contracted by transgression, that so God, the righteous Lawgiver, might consistently pardon the guilty; or, in the language of the apostle, "might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

And in this view of the Saviour's character and work, there is every thing which is fitted to fill our minds with profound reverence and awe; for what can be more awful than to contemplate the Son of God suffering the infliction of divine wrath for sin? and what more overwhelming than the thought, that we are covered as with a leprosy, with that evil and abominable thing for which Christ so suffered? Such a view of Christ's character and work, taken by itself, could only fill us with the deepest humiliation and self-abasement, by exhibiting to us the evil and malignity of sin, and reminding us of the fearful amount of our own transgressions. And it is well if this view of the Saviour's work, whereby he was declared to be just, has produced the effect of abasing, and laying us low in the dust, and even forcing upon us the question, Can sins like mine be forgiven? for then are we in the state of mind best fitted to receive the consolation which the next clause of this passage is designed to impart. The prophet says of Christ, "He is just, and having salvation,"—that is, he brings or carries salvation. This qualification of having salvation, and of being able to bestow it on as many as he will, is the consequence or effect of his being just,—that is, of his having fulfilled all righteousness. And that he should have undertaken to fulfil that righteousness, including as it did the endurance of the penalty incurred by sin, for the purpose of acquiring the right or prerogative of bestowing salvation or eternal life on as many as should believe in him, is such a manifestation of compassion and love as is fitted to remove all the fears and misgivings of those who have been taught to see, in the death of Christ, the true character of sin, and what they themselves deserve as sinners. And this willingness of Christ to save the guilty, is still farther manifested by what is stated in the subsequent part of the passage, where it is declared of Christ, that the salvation

which he brought was not for the ancient people of God alone,—that their peculiar distinction, as the instruments by means of which God had been wont to make himself known, and to assert his supremacy in the sight of the nations, was soon to cease,—that the warlike power of Israel and Judah, whereby the heathen had formerly been subdued, was to be cut off,—and that, nevertheless, the King of Zion's authority should extend to the whole world, because he was to speak peace to the heathen, as well as to his ancient people, and by doing so was to unite Jews and Gentiles in one holy, happy, redeemed family. This prophecy necessarily implied not only that Christ would be willing to bestow salvation on all who should seek to him for it, but that he would call those who sought not after him,—that he would exercise his power as the universal Sovereign in spreading abroad among the nations the glad tidings of salvation; for, unless he did so, it never would be done by a world lying in sin. "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the heathen; and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."

The view which the prophet has thus given of the character of Christ, when he represents him as just, and having salvation, and yet meek and lowly, is fitted to impress us with the most profound reverence and awe, and at the same time to command our love and confidence. And this view is farther illustrated, in a manner the most impressive and affecting, by the transaction which the prophet foretold in connection with it, and the fulfilment of which is recorded by all the evangelists. It may appear, indeed, at first sight, that lowliness did mainly or almost exclusively mark the manner of our Lord's entering into Jerusalem. But it will appear very differently if we consider the circumstances which accompanied and followed his entrance into the city, as we have already seen them recorded by the evangelists. In the acclamations of the very great multitude by the way, and of the children in the temple,—in the awe with which the bitterest of our Lord's enemies were stricken,—and in the haste and terror with which the profane defilers of the temple fled from his presence, there was a manifestation of moral power and grandeur on his part altogether divine, and rendered more

impressive by the outward circumstances in which he appeared. And it was, obviously, for the purpose of manifesting this marvellous combination of majesty and meekness, of dignity and lowliness, that our Lord acted as he is recorded to have done. He did not enter into Jerusalem, in the way related of him, merely to show that he was the person foretold by the prophet. He did so for the purpose of more fully and clearly revealing his character to the Church,—making it manifest to her, on the one hand, that he could humble the proudest and most powerful of her enemies; and giving her the gracious assurance, on the other, that he was accessible to the poorest and the most despised who sought refuge in his mercy. Everywhere, indeed, in Scripture this view of the Redeemer's character is presented to us; and very distinctly in the words before us. But it is placed in a light peculiarly vivid and affecting, in the transaction foretold by the prophet,—as I doubt not the experience of many an humble believer can testify; for to mourners in Zion,—to the sorrowful and downcast in spirit, and broken in heart,—what can be more animating than the declaration of the prophet, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

LXIX.

THE FOUNTAIN OPENED FOR SIN AND UNCLEANNESS.

ZECHARIAH XIII. 1.

THE day here referred to is spoken of by the prophet, in the preceding chapter, as one that was to be very remarkable for another reason besides that here stated. "And it shall come to pass in that day," says he, at the 9th verse, "that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart." This deep and universal mourning which was one day to pervade the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, is ascribed by the prophet to their looking on him whom they had pierced; and that the person thus described was Christ, is placed beyond all doubt by the express testimony of Scripture. In his account of our Lord's cruci-

fixion, the evangelist John tells us that "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water;" and that this "was done that the scripture should be fulfilled, They shall look on him whom they pierced." And, in allusion to the same prophecy, it is said in the Book of Revelation, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him." The prophecy, then, recorded in the passage before us, must have referred to a period subsequent to our Lord's manifestation in the flesh; for it was only after he had been crucified and slain, that the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem could look on Him whom they had pierced. Nor has the prophecy, I think, been yet fulfilled in all its extent. There was, indeed, in Jerusalem, soon after our Lord's death and resurrection, an example of such a mourning as the prophet has here described; for, on the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached to his countrymen, pressing home upon their conscience the guilt of having taken, and, by wicked hands, crucified and slain the Lord of glory, we are told that "they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men, brethren, what shall we do?"

Of these men it is obvious that they were looking "on him whom they" had "pierced," and were mourning on account of the part which they had taken in his condemnation and death. And that this mourning was a godly sorrow, awakened by "the spirit of grace and of supplications," is abundantly evident from the result; for on the same day there were added unto the Church about three thousand souls. But though this marvellous display of divine grace did, in its effect, correspond with what is here described, yet, in point of extent, it was limited, as compared with what the prophet foretells. It was but a very small portion indeed of the house of David, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who were, on the day of Pentecost, or have been even to this day, brought to "look on him whom they have pierced:" whereas the prophet here describes a mourning so universal, as well as profound, that it is obviously a national and a real conversion of the people of Israel which he foretells. Indeed, he labours, as it were, to find language wherein to express the extent as well as the depth of that mourning. He compares it to the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon, which

was the lamentation of the whole people of Judah for the death of the good king Josiah. He then singles out the two leading tribes of Israel as representing the whole, namely, the tribe of Judah, in which the kingly office had been established in the house of David, and the tribe of Levi, to which the priestly office had been confined; and, to show that this mourning would not be limited to the heads or leading men of the tribes, he mentions a family in each, Nathan and Shimei, intimating that the mourning would be heard in every household. And he concludes with expressly declaring that all the families that remained, even the whole house of David, and inhabitants of Jerusalem, would participate in this common sorrow. Nor is the prophet less emphatic in the language which he employs to express the depth and intenseness of that sorrow. He compares it to the mourning of a parent who mourns for an only son,—of one who is in bitterness for a first-born; and to intimate how much it was a personal matter with each, he represents all the members of families mourning alone, or in retirement,—"every family apart, and their wives apart." Of such a universal and unfeigned penitence as this, the day of Pentecost furnished only a type; and the prediction before us, therefore, must refer to that glorious period when God shall turn again the spiritual captivity of his ancient covenant people,—when the "blindness in part" that "has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in," shall be removed; "and so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

And how is this mighty change to be effected? The prophet tells us how; and, in doing so, he tells us how, in every case, a sinner is converted unto God. It shall come to pass on that day, that "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications." The conversion of the Jews is thus traced to the sovereign interposition of divine grace, to which, indeed, the Scriptures ascribe every instance of such conversion. But the sovereignty of that grace is placed in a peculiarly impressive light, in the case of God's ancient people. It was in the pride of a self-righteous spirit that they despised and rejected the Saviour, when he appeared among them, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;"

and it is in the same spirit that they have continued, through successive generations, to reject him. Those who lived during our Lord's sojourn on the earth, would have deemed it a national degradation to acknowledge him as the Messiah promised to the fathers; and this peculiar enmity to Jesus of Nazareth they bequeathed to their children. Now that, after a long succession of ages of unbelief, on the part of the Jews, and of forbearance, yet severe chastisement, on the part of God, there should be in reserve for them such blessings as are here set forth, is a marvellous manifestation of the riches of divine grace; and that such obstinacy of unbelief, in opposition to their own Scriptures, which they profess to regard as the word of God, and which throughout testify of Christ,—that such unbelief should at length be overcome, is an equally striking display of the power of the same grace. And all this the prophet brings very prominently out, in his account of the nature of the change which is one day to take place in the ancient people of God, as well as of the manner in which that change is to be wrought. While he ascribes it to the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit, giving them grace to feel their guilt and helplessness, and prompting them to ask for deliverance, he represents it as the effect of this enlightening and quickening influence of the Spirit, that they look to Christ,—to Him whom before they would have thought it a degradation to acknowledge, but in whom they now see their only hope of escape from that guilt and misery, to a sense of which they have been awakened. And with this discovery of their own state, and of the true character of Christ, they will feel, the prophet says, as if they had been the betrayers and the murderers of Jesus. "They shall look on him whom they pierced." Their hands, it is true, did not pierce him,—their voice did not swell the appalling cry, "Crucify him, crucify him." Eighteen hundred years have already elapsed since that dreadful deed was done; and none can tell how long it may be before that generation of Israel shall be in existence, in which this prophecy shall be fulfilled. But come that fulfilment when it may, the penitent house of Israel will feel as the prophet here foretells. It will be no consolation to them to think that it was their forefathers, and not they themselves, who actually crucified and slew the Lord of glory. They will be conscious that they cherished the same

spirit of enmity to Christ that their fathers did, and that, by their obstinate and long continued unbelief, they had participated in the guilt of the fearful imprecation, "His blood be on us and on our children." They will see that their transgressions were the procuring cause of his suffering and death, and that the spear which pierced his side was but the emblem of that guilt for which his holy soul was pierced, when he was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities; when he "poured out his soul unto death," bearing their "sins in his own body on the tree." They will look on Him, therefore, whom they had pierced, "and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

But, then, it will not be the bitter anguish of despair; for in that same day they will see "a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." That fountain had, indeed, been opened long before,—even from the beginning; for in that fountain Abel, the first saint that left this earth, had been washed from sin and from uncleanness; and when Christ died, a free access to this fountain was proclaimed to all, both Jew and Gentile. But they, of whom the prophet here speaks, did not see that fountain till the day on which they looked on Him whom they had pierced. Through their unbelief it was shut to them. But when the day comes which the prophet foretells, they will see it flowing forth in all its infinite and inexhaustible fulness; and while they look on Him whom they pierced, they will see in the blood and water which issued from his wounded side, an emblem of that efficacious fountain in which they shall be cleansed from all the guilt, and in due time purified from all the pollution, of sin. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness."

Such is the change which will one day be wrought on God's ancient people, and such the blessings of which they will then be made partakers. But the account which the prophet here gives of that change and of these blessings, is exemplified in the case of every sinner who is united to Christ by a living faith. The peculiarities which attach to the condition of the Jews, and to God's

manner of dealing with them,—their descent from those who crucified the Saviour,—the obstinacy with which they have continued to deny the Messiahship of Jesus,—the testimony which their history has been made to bear to the truth of the Gospel, —and their final conversion, as a people, to the faith of that Gospel,—these peculiarities will, no doubt, render that conversion a brighter and more glorious display of the grace, and power, and faithfulness of God, than we see exhibited in the conversion of other men. But the conversion itself is, in substance, the same in every case. It is to be traced to the same source,—it is wrought by the same agency,—it is followed by the same effects. The account, therefore, which the prophet has here given of the conversion of the Jews, and the remarks that have already been made upon it, are equally applicable to all who have really become partakers of the grace of the Gospel. The spiritual state of every fallen and unregenerate man is essentially the same; for all, as the Scriptures declare, are guilty before God,—all are, by nature, the children of wrath. Differences there may be, and are, among men; and these differences may be greatly modified by outward circumstances. But, unless it be a difference wrought by the Spirit of God, it is not such as to change the relation in which they stand to him,—so that one is in a state of reconciliation with him, and the other in a state of condemnation. The children of unbelieving Jews are trained and educated to hold the opinion, that Jesus of Nazareth was not the Messiah promised unto the fathers, and, therefore, that he can do nothing for them; and this opinion, constantly and zealously inculcated, may serve to strengthen them in their natural self-righteousness and harden them more and more against a sense of their guilt, and of their need of a Saviour. On the other hand, the children of professing Christians may be trained and educated in the opinion, that Jesus is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; so that, in so far as opinion goes, they may seem to be in a condition the very opposite of that in which the former are. But a mere opinion, or speculative notion, that Jesus is the Christ, is not faith in him,—not that faith with which salvation is connected. Such an opinion may be held, while the heart is as little affected by the momentous truth as is the heart of a Jew who holds the opposite opinion: "No man," says the

apostle,—and, in saying so, he makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile,—"no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." And this is, in substance, what the prophet says in the context, where he traces the conversion of the Jews to the operation of the Holy Spirit, and that, again, to an act of sovereign grace on the part of God: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced."

Whatever men may know and believe about the Gospel, or however sound the opinion they may entertain on the subject, it is the Spirit of God alone that can render that opinion a deep and heartfelt conviction. They may have been taught to believe that they are sinners, and they may think that they believe it; but it is the Spirit alone who makes them feel that they are guilty and condemned. They may never have doubted the Scripture declaration, that Christ died for sinners, suffering the just for the unjust, that he might bring them unto God; but it is only under the quickening and enlightening influence of the Spirit of grace and supplications, that they are made to understand and feel that if Christ's death is to avail them,—if the shedding of his blood is to procure pardon and reconciliation for them, it is because he was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities,—because he bare their "sins in his own body on the tree." They may often have heard, and might think that they understood and believed, the precious truth, that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." But the Spirit alone teaches them, that if Christ's righteousness can ever be imputed to them, it is because their individual guilt, not the sins of men generally, but their sins, had been imputed to him, and were the procuring cause of his sufferings and death. If, therefore, they look to Christ in penitence and faith, they feel that they are looking on him whom they pierced, and it is this consideration that gives depth and intenseness to their godly sorrow. But, with these discoveries of their own guilt, and of the connection between their sins and the Saviour's sufferings, another truth,—namely, the precious truth in the passage before us,—opens upon them like a discovery also. They might long have been familiar with it in words, and might

never have doubted its truth as a proposition addressed to their understanding. But they saw not its value,—they understood not the fulness of its meaning,—they felt not its preciousness, till the day that they were awakened to some right apprehension of their state and character, as guilty and polluted in the sight of God. In that day they saw that a fountain has been opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.

And how precious should this truth be to mourners in Zion, to all in whose hearts the Spirit of grace and of supplications has awakened a sense of sin, and of godly sorrow on account of it! The few words of this prediction contain a very comprehensive statement of the gracious and full provision which has been made for meeting the necessities of their miserable and helpless condition. They set forth Christ's work in purchasing redemption for his people, and the Spirit's work in applying to them that redemption. For, first, it is here declared, that a fountain has been opened for sin,—that is, for the guilt of sin,—so that this guilt being washed away, believers, they who come to this fountain, are no longer under condemnation, but are justified, or, in other words, are pardoned and accepted as righteous in the sight of God. And this pardon, this blotting out of the sentence of condemnation which stood against them, this reconciliation between God and them is what they first need, and what they feel that they first need, to bring peace to their troubled mind. Their conscience being disturbed by a painful sense of guilt, and a depressing apprehension of danger, they cannnot be at rest, till they discover how they may be forgiven, and till they have some hope that they will be so. They may, indeed, for a time, and, I fear, they frequently do seek this forgiveness in a wrong way, and place their hope of it on a wrong ground. Their conscience tells them that they are guilty and deserve punishment, and they are ready to acknowledge that God would be just and righteous in inflicting that punishment. But calling to mind the many declarations of Scripture concerning the mercy of God, his long-suffering patience, his gracious invitations to sinners to return to him, his unwillingness that they should perish, and his readiness to forgive, they may, for a time, cling to the self-righteous notion, which all are prone to cherish, that if they

feel regret and sorrow for their past sins, and endeavour to live a more holy life in time to come, God may pity, and spare, and pardon them. For a time they may not see, that in expecting God to act in this way, they are really supposing that he has no fixed, eternal principle on which he deals with sinners of mankind. They may not see, what is nevertheless true, that they are not assigning any definite or intelligible place to Christ in the matter of their pardon or justification; for though they may think that they are looking for pardon through Christ, or for Christ's sake, they are really looking to their own regret for past sins, and their determination to avoid sin in future, as the ground on which God will be merciful to them.

This self-righteous principle, which is inherent in the heart of every fallen man, together with very inadequate views of the true character of sin, and of what sin really deserves, may, for a time, lead convicted sinners to seek for something in themselves, in their regret for the past, and in their reformation for the future, as a ground of hope towards God,—the hope that, when their regret is deep enough, and their reformation of character complete enough, then they may expect that their fears will be dissipated, and that their wounded conscience will be healed. But they will find, in their experience, that neither their regret nor their reformation will ever be enough to pacify their conscience. The question, Am I yet reconciled to God? will be as far as ever from being answered; and they will be convinced, at last, that their hope of pardon must rest on something without themselves,—on something altogether independent of what they now are, or what they will hereafter become. When they are brought to entertain some adequate conceptions of the true character of sin, they will see that the forgiveness of sin must rest on something more definite, more solid, and infinitely more worthy than any thing in them. They will be convinced that this is necessary both for their own peace, and for the vindication of God's justice and rectitude; and they will discover in the death of Christ a sufficient ground, and the only ground, for the forgiveness of the guilty. They will see in that most marvellous event such a satisfaction to the justice of God, as renders the pardon of the guiltiest of men consistent with all the attributes of the divine nature; and they will be amazed at their own pre-

sumption in ever having entertained the thought that any thing of theirs,—their sorrow for sin, their acknowledgment of guilt, or their resolution of amendment,—was necessary to be taken into account as forming part of the reason why God should pardon them. They will see that, in entertaining such a thought, they were really supposing that the fountain which the Son of God opened, when he shed his blood, needed something of theirs to give it value enough to satisfy God's justice, and virtue enough to pacify their conscience. They will be convinced that, until they are washed in that fountain, all their guilt attaches to them without diminution; and that if they could but wash there, it would be completely and for ever cleansed away,—the sentence of their condemnation would be blotted out,—they would be accepted as righteous in the sight of God.

But they will also see, that this fountain is open to them as well as to others,—that they are invited to come, and wash and be clean. And when they are enabled to believe Christ's word, as addressed to themselves personally,—when, putting away from them all other grounds of hope, they do, as it were, take Christ at his word, and put his power and faithfulness to the test,—when they rest exclusively on his finished work, his perfect righteousness, for pardon, believing that he bids them do so, and that he undertakes for them acceptance with God;—then they feel that they are standing on sure and solid ground,—that God is dealing with them on a clear and distinct principle, independent of any thing so uncertain as their sorrow for the past, or their resolution of amendment for the future,—and that he extends pardon to them for a reason worthy of himself, worthy of his glorious character and perfections, and altogether apart from any thing so worthless as the dead works by which they once laboured to pacify their conscience, but which, as they found in their bitter experience, served only to defile and burden it the more. It is in thus looking to Christ and resting exclusively on him, that they really apply to the fountain opened for sin; it is then, in fact, that it is first opened to them. Open, indeed, it always was, and always flowing in inexhaustible fulness. But, like Naaman of old, who refused to go and wash in Jordan, as the prophet bid him, saying, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" they were labouring to

effect, at least, some partial or preparatory cleansing of their own, to fit, or warrant them, to apply to the fountain which Christ has opened. But when they relinquish the vain and self-righteous effort, and betake themselves, as they are, to the one only efficacious fountain, its cleansing virtue will become a matter of experience with them. They will discover, not only that the blood of Christ can alone cleanse from sin, but that it cleanses from all sin. They will find, not that it lessens their guilt, leaving something for themselves to cleanse away, but that it removes it altogether; and that when sprinkled on the conscience, that blood not only purifies it, by relieving it from the depressing sense of unforgiven guilt, but purges it "from dead works, to serve the living God."

I have said that pardon is the first thing that sinners need, and the first thing that convicted sinners feel that they need, though, in too many instances, they seek it in a wrong way. It is only to be found, as we have seen, in Christ; and the comfort of it is only to be experienced in coming to him, which is here figuratively represented as washing in the fountain which he has opened in his blood. But sinners need more than pardon. It is not enough that their guilt is taken away, so as that there is no longer any condemnation to them. Though they may be justified, or accepted as righteous in the sight of God, on account of the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, and received by faith alone on their part, yet the pollution of sin still cleaves to them, and from that, too, they need to be cleansed. But for this also, which is the Spirit's work, provision has been made. When Christ opened a fountain in which to wash his people from the guilt of their sins, he opened also a fountain of divine influences, whence might flow forth upon them that water which purifies from the defilement of sin. The blessing or benefit of sanctification is no less the fruit of Christ's death than justification is. He procured for his people the gift of the Holy Ghost, whose immediate work it is to sanctify them; and this work is set forth under the figure of a fountain opened for uncleanness. There is, indeed, no expression more frequently employed in Scripture than water is, to set forth the Spirit and his work. Sometimes he is represented as water provided for the refreshment of the weary and thirsty,—a figure which beautifully de-

scribes the comfort and consolation which he imparts to afflicted souls. He is so represented in the 41st chapter of Isaiah, verse 17, "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." But he is also, and perhaps more frequently, set forth as water that purifies or cleanses. Thus, in the 36th chapter of Ezekiel, the Spirit is promised in these words: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you; .... and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." In the New Testament, also, we find the Spirit spoken of under the same symbol or figure of water. Thus our Lord said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And the apostle Paul in his Epistle to Titus says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

The blessed fountain of the Spirit's influence, then, has been opened to believers as certainly and as fully for their sanctification, as has the fountain of Christ's blood for washing away their guilt. This, indeed, is from the first a matter of experience with believers; for it was by the outpouring upon them of the Spirit of grace and supplications that they were first quickened to a sense of their guilt and misery, and were prompted to look to Him whom they had pierced, at once with godly sorrow and with good hope. This, however, was but the beginning of the Spirit's work on their heart. They feel that much, very much, requires to be done to purify them from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, so that they may perfect holiness in the fear of God. And it is on account of this provision which has been made for their sanctification, as well as for their pardon, that Christ is very precious to them. They are fully sensible of the value of justification, the pardon of sin, and acceptance with God, inasmuch

as for a time, perhaps a long time, it was the great, the main, the engrossing question with them how they were to be forgiven. But the very same light which shone on the path that led them to the Lamb whose blood washed them from the guilt of sin, showed them also the loathsomeness of sin itself, and awakened the irrepressible desire of being cleansed from its pollution. And herein the work of the Spirit differs from the mere stirrings of natural conscience. Conscience may be alarmed by a sense of danger, and this fear may awaken a desire for pardon. But conscience would be quieted if pardon could only be attained,—that is to say, if the dread of punishment were removed, though the heart were, as before, under the dominion of sin. It is not so, however, with the conscience which has been awakened by the Spirit of grace and supplications. To the soul that has been so quickened, sin itself, as well as the dread of its punishment, becomes a burden too heavy for it to bear; and to such a soul, therefore, it is a most precious truth that they who have been brought to Christ shall be washed, and sanctified, as well as justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Every day's experience tells believers that they are absolutely dependent on the Spirit for carrying on and perfecting the good work which he hath begun in them. The moment that they set themselves in earnest to contend with sin, they discover that their spiritual enemies are too many and too strong for them. So long as they had inadequate views of the evil of sin, and were satisfied with abstaining from the more flagrant violations of the divine law, which natural conscience, as well as their worldly interests, prompted them to resist, they were not sensible of the power which sin had acquired over them. They knew nothing of the painful conflict which the apostle describes, and which constrained him to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But when their eyes were opened to see the true character of sin, as it is exhibited in the cross of Christ, and began to discover how it has perverted their will, corrupted their heart, defiled their conscience, and alienated their affections from God, they then began to feel that they had a real conflict to maintain, and a conflict, moreover, that would be utterly hopeless but for the gracious assurance, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the

Lord of hosts." But they are encouraged and will be strengthened to maintain the conflict, by the Spirit of grace fulfilling in them "all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." Every day, indeed, will furnish new evidence of their own weakness, their utter helplessness. But if the effect of every such discovery be to shut them up to a simple reliance on the Saviour's promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness," they will find, as the apostle did, that when they are weak then are they strong, and they will acknowledge the gracious work of the Spirit in all the comfort which they experience, and in all the victories which they gain over their spiritual enemies. When they seek and find, in the Word and ordinances, spiritual food and refreshment to their souls, they will recognise the gracious operation of the Spirit applying to them, through these ordinances, the benefits of the new covenant, the blessings of the Redeemer's purchase. Should they at any time lose sight of Christ, and fall into perplexity and darkness, doubting whether they had ever found him, it is to the Spirit that they will look for light, and life, and comfort; and their prayer will be, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit." And as often as they experience a new revival of spirit and a new enlargement of heart,—as often as they successfully resist temptation, and cheerfully give themselves to self-denying duties,—as often as they are conscious of having advanced a step in the divine life, by a growing desire after a closer communion with God, and a growing capacity for the enjoyment of that communion,—then in that experience they have a fresh proof of the divine efficacy of that fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleannesss to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

LXX.

"AWAKE, O SWORD, AGAINST MY SHEPHERD."

ZECHARIAH XIII. 7.

We are not left in any doubt or uncertainty as to the question, by whom and of whom were these words spoken? The prophet who was commissioned to utter and to record them tells us that they were spoken by the Lord of hosts,—that is, by God the Lawgiver and Supreme Ruler; and our Lord has expressly declared that they were spoken of him. He has informed us, moreover, that they were spoken prophetically of his sufferings and death; for it was immediately after the institution of the Supper, and when he was about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners, that he said to his disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." The words under consideration, then, are the words of God the Father; and this being evident beyond all doubt, we might proceed to inquire, what is the import of this mysterious command which they contain, and on what ground such a command could go forth against him who is the eternal, the only begotten, and well beloved Son of God. It is evident that there could be nothing in him, nothing of his own, on account of which that covenant could be issued; for it was impossible that he could ever cease to be the object of the Father's ineffable love. But great care is taken in this passage to bring this verse very distinctly before us, by the emphatic language employed to designate or set forth Christ. Not

only does it bear testimony to the dignity of his person, by asserting the divinity of his nature and his equality with the Father, but it represents him as actually employed, at the moment the command here recorded was issued, in executing a work which was most accordant with the Father's will,—a work, in fact, which the Father himself had given him to do. If, then, we would clearly see the principle on which the command in this verse was issued, or if we would in any measure rightly apprehend the awful import of the command itself, we must keep in view what is here carefully pressed on our attention respecting the person and work of Him against whom the commission was given: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts."

In the first place, then, Christ is here called God's shepherd. The title of shepherd, as applied to Christ, must be familiar to every one. It is the title which our Lord expressly assumed in his public teaching, during his manifestation in the flesh. "I am the good shepherd," says he: "the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. . . . . I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. . . . . My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." And in like manner, in the writings of the apostles, we find him called "the chief Shepherd,"—"the great Shepherd of the sheep,"—"the Shepherd and Bishop" of his people's souls. In these, however, and in similar passages, the subject more immediately brought before us is the relation that subsists between Christ and his redeemed people,—his pity for them in their wandering and lost estate; his love in coming to seek after, and save, and bring them back to his fold; his tenderness and condescension in winning them to hear his voice, and persuading them to follow him; and the rich provision which he has made for those who are persuaded to enter into his fold, so that "they shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and shall find pasture."

I do not say that these passages have no reference to the Father, or to the manifestation of his grace and mercy towards the lost and wandering sheep, whom his Son came to seek and to save. On the contrary, our Lord continually refers to the

Father, not only as approving of his work, in thus seeking and saving the lost, but as having appointed him thereto; and he expressly declares, that if he did save any, it was because the Father had given them to him, and that his Father who gave them to him is greater than all, so that none is able to pluck them out of his Father's hand. And in like manner, when the apostle speaks of Christ as the great Shepherd, he refers to the Father as testifying his approbation of Christ's work in that character by raising him from the dead; for he says, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will." Still, however, it is Christ's love for sinners, the lost and wandering sheep, that is mainly brought before us in the passage where he is represented as "the good," and "the chief," and "the great Shepherd."

But in this verse under consideration, the leading idea presented to us is the Father's appointment of Christ to that office, and which is most emphatically expressed by the words, "my shepherd." These words plainly intimate, what is elsewhere taught in Scripture, that the purpose of saving lost sinners originated in the love of the Father,—that those whom Christ came to seek and to restore were the objects of the Father's choice,—and that their recovery, therefore, was as dear to him as it was to Christ who, from love also, undertook to accomplish that recovery. This truth is, of course, necessarily implied in all that is said in Scripture of Christ's love to his people, the love of the Shepherd for his sheep; for the Father and the Son are one,—one in nature, one in design, one in affection. But the words of the verse are obviously intended to direct our thoughts more immediately to the scheme of redemption as the scheme of the Father's devising, on the execution of which he looked with ineffable satisfaction and delight. The words, "my shepherd," intimate that he to whom they were applied was doing the Father's work, seeking out and saving the miserable and helpless objects of the Father's love, and doing so in obedience to the Father's express appointment. And that the salvation of sinners, the ingathering of his elect people, who, like all their fallen brethren of mankind, had as sheep gone astray, was an object on

which God the Father looked with infinite complacency, is abundantly testified in Scripture. The Old Testament is full of the most affecting expressions of his compassion and love for the souls of men, and abounds with examples of his forbearance and long-suffering patience towards sinners,—as when we find him declaring, that as he lived, he had no pleasure in their death, and verifying this declaration, in their experience, by graciously waiting for their return. And in the New Testament there is presented to us the measure of this love in the marvellous declaration, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Nor was it only on account of his love and compassion for perishing sinners that the Father regarded with complacency and approbation the mediatorial work of his Son. It was by that work especially that his great name was to be glorified on the earth,—it was into this work that angels were to look with admiration and awe,—and there were they to see new and brighter manifestations of the divine character and perfections, for it is by the accomplishment of Christ's work for the salvation of the Church that "there had been made known to principalities and powers in heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God." Such, then, let us bear in mind, was the commission which Christ bore, and the work in which he was actually engaged, when the command went forth, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, saith the Lord of hosts."

But there is another title here applied to Christ, which it is of great importance to keep in view, in considering the meaning of the command, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow." I do not dwell upon this expression as one of the many proofs which Scripture furnishes of the divinity of our Lord, and of the doctrine of his incarnation,—of his assuming our nature into union with his divine nature, so as to form one person. This doctrine is, indeed, very plainly taught in the words before us; for it is only in this sense that we could attach any meaning to the expression, "the man that is my fellow,"—or, as it literally signifies, "the man my fellow." But I apprehend it is not so much for teaching or bearing testimony to that doctrine that the subject is here introduced, as for the purpose of the more powerfully arresting

our attention, and fixing our thoughts on the glorious character of the person against whom the sword was commanded to awake, and whom it was commissioned to smite. And how inconceivably glorious must that person be whom the Lord of hosts designates "my fellow!" The expression intimates, at once, equality of nature with himself, and the exercise of ineffable love and complacency towards him whom he thus designates, as participating in his glory and sharing in all his counsels. It sums up, in one word, the many sublime testimonies otherwise borne in Scripture, to the pre-existent state of glory and blessedness in which Christ from all eternity dwelt in the bosom of the Father. It is, in substance, what Christ, as the eternal Word, declared of himself, when he said, by the mouth of his prophet, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. . . . . Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." It is true, he is here called "the Man;" and he was to be truly such, when the time came that the command in this verse should be carried into effect. He was, for a season, to veil the essential glory of the Godhead, in the sight of intelligent creatures, under the garb of humanity; and so lowly was the condition in which he was to place himself, that, to the carnal eye, he had no form nor comeliness, and, when they should see him, there was no beauty that they should desire him,—he was to be despised and rejected of men. But he was never, at any moment,—even in the lowest depth of his humiliation,—less the object of the Father's ineffable love and complacency. Nay, we have already seen, that when he thus "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men," and when, "being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself," it was in compliance with the Father's will,—it was for the accomplishment of the Father's purpose of love towards the lost and helpless children of men,—it was for the manifestation of the Father's glory in the sight of all his intelligent creation. And frequently, as well as in the most emphatic language, do the Scriptures record the Father's holy approbation of this, his Son's humiliation,—the

ineffable satisfaction with which he regards the accomplishment of the work which he had given him to do. Nor was the Son, in his condition of humanity, less divine,—less the equal of the Father,—the fellow of the Lord of hosts. He was still very God,—the same glorious Person who in the beginning went forth in the might and omnipotence of the Godhead, and, in the exercise of creating energy, spoke the universe into being, when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Even in all the lowliness of his outward condition, when the most degraded of men were not afraid to revile, and spit upon, and buffet him, he was still "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person,"—so that they to whom spiritual discernment was given "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father;" and in testimony of this there came, once and again, during the period of his humiliation, "a voice from the excellent glory, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And this was the person against whom the command was given forth, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts."

In making these remarks, it was not my purpose to enter at length on the consideration either of the glory of Christ's person as God equal with the Father, or of the greatness of his work as the Shepherd of the sheep whom his Father had given him, and for whom he, as the good Shepherd, laid down his life. Both these subjects are, indeed, very distinctly presented in the words before us. But neither the one nor the other, nor both together, form the leading proposition in the verse we are considering. The great truth here taught is, that the Lord of hosts, God the Father, the Lawgiver, and Ruler, commanded the sword to awake and to smite Christ; and in order to rivet our attention on this strange truth, and the more deeply to impress us with its awful and mysterious meaning, care is taken to remind us both who this person is, and what was the office which he had undertaken and was employed in executing. And this is done in very brief but emphatic terms, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." Whatever, then, may be the import of the words, "Awake, O sword," we cannot read them, in con-

nection with what is here said of the person concerning whom they were spoken, without being deeply awed by the representation which they give of the majesty, the rectitude, the inflexible justice of the divine law. It is in the character of the Lawgiver that God here speaks; and in that character he only gives forth the demands of the law in all their unbending severity,—he only pronounces a sentence which must be executed without mercy and without indignation.

The character of the person against whom this sentence was pronounced brings out the inexorable nature of the divine law, as it never could have been brought out by the punishment of transgressors. That actual transgressors should suffer is an ordination in which our understanding and our conscience cannot fail to acquiesce as a right, or, if I may so speak, a natural thing,—an unavoidable consequence; and whatever may be the extent or severity of the punishment so inflicted, it might, perhaps, be connected in our minds with the idea of provocation, whereby the offenders had incurred the displeasure of Him against whom they had offended. But in the case before us, such an idea can have no place. The person of whom the verse before us speaks had never offended, never incurred the displeasure of God, never done any thing to provoke the Holy One of Israel to anger. Nay, he was the beloved Son of God,—the object of a love which the infinite mind of God only could feel, and which divine excellence and loveliness could alone call forth; and he was at the instant engaged in a work on which God looked with holy approbation and complacency. But this love and approbation of the Father could neither arrest nor qualify the sentence of the judge. Christ had undertaken to satisfy the law for the sins of his people, and in the eye of the law he was chargeable with the guilt of these sins. The penalty which had been incurred, and which, with the full concurrence and approbation of the Lawgiver, he had taken upon himself, behoved to be endured. His own spotless innocence, the divine excellence of his character, his being ineffably dear to the Father, as his only begotten and well beloved Son, could avail nothing when the hour of retribution came, either to avert the execution of the sentence or to mitigate its severity. He had pledged his divine faithfulness to save those whom the Father had given him; and this faithful-

ness could as soon have failed as the law could relinquish its demands, or retract the punishment which it had awarded. That punishment must be endured to the uttermost, or the guilty could not be saved. A compromise of the claims of the law would have been an abandonment of these claims. The law knows nothing of mercy; it stands directly opposed to it. Mercy may be exercised, and it is exercised, as the hope of every believer testifies; but it is not by rendering the law soft and indulgent, but by finding out a way whereby the law may be fully satisfied, so that it is not dishonoured in the pardon of the transgressor of the law. Sentence of condemnation had passed upon men as transgressors, and it must be executed. The Son of God said, "Lo, I come;" let the sentence take effect against me. But what if, in consideration of his being the Son of God, the beloved of the Father, his only begotten, his equal,—what if, in consideration of this, the penalty of the law had been partly remitted, its severity mitigated, and the suffering softened, as a Father's love might have prompted him to soften it,—what would this have been but to have left the law dishonoured still, and to have made Christ the minister of sin? To suppose that such a compromise could have been made in favour even of the Son of God, for the purpose of mitigating his sufferings, we are to suppose that he had come into the world, not to fulfil the law, and to magnify and make it honourable, but to render it less rigorous,—that is, less holy and just,—and to make it, in fact, indulgent to sin, requiring obedience which it never meant to enforce, and threatening penalties which it was not intended rigorously to exact. Yet such, in substance, is the supposition on which multitudes, I fear, rest their hopes for acceptance with God. They do not, perhaps, imagine that any relaxation of the demands of the law was made in mitigation of Christ's sufferings; but they assume that for his sake this law will be relaxed in regard to them; and they reckon upon the mercy of God, his mere pity and compassion indulgently overlooking imperfections and shortcomings, provided they have been able to maintain what the world generally regards as a virtuous and blameless character. Oh, with what a voice of thunder should this passage speak to such persons, and would speak to them, did they but understand any thing of its true import! How quickly would it dissipate

their delusive and fatal dream of God's mercy, as if it were such as to prevent him executing the threatenings which he has denounced against sin! Did they at all perceive the awfully sublime view which is here presented of the rectitude and rigour of the divine law, they would see that the sentence which it passes upon transgressors has nothing to do with any feeling of anger or resentment, and cannot, therefore, be reversed or mitigated from a mere feeling of pity and compassion. It is this consideration that ought to render that sentence most alarming to sinners now, and which will on the judgment-day wither the strength and silence the cavils of the finally impenitent and ungodly. Could they believe that the condemnation passed upon them was dictated by some feeling of anger and irritation, they might have some miserable gratification in resenting, though they could not reverse, what they might persuade themselves was a cruel and unjust sentence. But they will not have even this miserable alleviation of their sufferings. The sentence against them will be given forth in all the unruffled calmness and majesty of law, and as the dictate not of passion, but of eternal truth and justice. Nay, it will be given forth by Him who had often entreated them to take shelter in his own righteousness, and who, if influenced in his judgment by any mere feeling, would be influenced by a feeling of compassion. But such feelings can have no place where the claims of God's immediate law are to be satisfied. If such a feeling could have been permitted to operate, must it not have been when the law came to reckon with the only begotten and well beloved Son of God,—with him who had no transgression of his own for which to account or be reckoned with, but who, with a divine generosity, stood forth to satisfy the law on behalf of the guilty children of men? And what mercy did He experience? What qualification of the sentence, or what mitigation of the penalty, was admitted on his account? Let this passage answer the question: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts."

The principle, then, on which the command in this passage was issued was, that the divine law must necessarily be vindicated by the execution of its sentence against sin, the infliction of the penalty on the guilty party. The law itself could make no provision either for mitigating the punishment to the trans-

gressors, or for transferring that punishment to another. And when the Lawgiver himself did consent to transfer, or rather did devise a plan whereby to transfer that punishment to a substitute, so that the original transgressors might be set free, still the law required that the penalty should be exacted; and on the same principle it required that it should be exacted without mercy and without mitigation. All this, I think, is very plain from the principle which I have endeavoured to state and illustrate. But the uncompromising rigour of the law in requiring not only that its sentence should be executed, but executed to the uttermost, even till the threatened penalty should be exhausted, is very emphatically asserted in the words before us, "Awake, O sword." The expression conveys the idea, that the judgment which had been pronounced against sin had been for a season delayed,—that justice had been, as it were, slumbering,—but that the hour of retribution being come, an unqualified commission was given to the sword of justice to do its work with unsparing severity. And such in reality was the method of the divine procedure. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," was the solemn warning addressed to man in his unfallen state. But though man fell, and from that moment not only became mortal, liable to temporal death, but in the death of happiness in the soul, in the hatred and dread of God which then took possession of him, he had a foretaste of that eternal death which he had incurred, yet the sentence was not executed in all its awful meaning. An arrest was laid on the threatened judgment. The covenant of grace was announced,—that covenant wherein the Son of God undertook in human nature to bear and to expiate human guilt. Sacrifice was appointed to prefigure the death which he was to endure; and age after age passed away, during which countless multitudes reaped the benefits of the promised and prefigured atonement, as if it had been actually made.

But though the execution of the sentence was delayed, the law had relinquished nothing of its claims. Sooner or later God was to declare his righteousness in thus remitting sins that were past through his forbearance, and to make it manifest that he was just in all his procedure. The flaming sword which had been placed at the garden of Eden, turning every way to keep

the way of the tree of life, had not been laid aside or discharged from its office. That sword behoved to be encountered before any one could approach that tree; and when Christ, therefore, at the appointed time did approach it to take thereof and give to his people, that they might eat and live for ever, the command went forth, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow." And who can conceive of the full meaning of this mysterious command? It was an unqualified commission to divine justice to inflict the punishment due to sin. It was such an infliction as the hand of God alone, the supreme Lawgiver, could impose. There was, indeed, an accumulation of other sufferings laid upon Christ,—sufferings very numerous and very sharp. From infancy to manhood, he endured all the pain, and the toil, and the sore travail to which humanity, from all its sinless infirmity, is liable; and all these aggravated by what sinful humanity can little conceive of,—the unceasing pain which his holy, human soul must have experienced in holding converse with unholy creatures. He was subjected, moreover, to the bitterest enmity, in the form of reproach and persecution, and the infliction of all the ignominy and cruelty which the guilty passions of men could dictate. And the malignity of devils was permitted to work its will without restraint, in assailing him with the fiercest temptations, and with all the desperate energy of their mysterious power. But besides, and infinitely beyond all this was the bitterness of that cup which the Father himself did put, and which none but the Father could put into his hands,—that cup concerning which he was constrained to pray once, and again, and a third time, with growing earnestness, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But it was not possible. He could not abandon the great work which he had undertaken, —the work of saving the guilty by standing as their substitute; for his love to sinners, and his faithfulness to the covenant which he had made with his Father, were pledged to finish that work. And if he finished it, it was only by drinking of the cup which his Father had given him. And this, accordingly, he unreservedly consented to do; for at each time that he prayed, "Let this cup pass from me," he added, "nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." But all this implied, what the passage before us plainly asserts, that Christ endured the full and unmitigated penalty

which was due to sin, and that the penalty was immediately inflicted by the hand of God himself. What that infliction was we cannot conceive. But surely there is enough to fill our minds with profound awe and holy fear, when we read, that he who was the Son of God, the Father's equal, the Lord of glory, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy," saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," while as yet he was only anticipating the near approach of what was coming upon him,—that in his agony, when it did come, his sweat was as great drops of blood falling down to the ground; and in the last hour of his extremity, when not only were earth and hell combined against him, but when he was shut out from the light of that countenance on which he had from all eternity looked with ineffable delight, even the countenance of his Father, by whom he was for a season deserted, he was heard to exclaim, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is only from what is thus said of Christ, or what he said of himself, during his season of desertion and darkness, that we can form any idea at all of what he endured as the Saviour of the guilty; and though, with all the aid of such intimations, our conceptions of his sufferings must be very inadequate, nay, utterly feeble and infinitely short of the reality, yet they may serve to give great emphasis to the statement in the passage we are considering. It is to the closing scene of our Lord's sufferings that we are especially to look for an explanation, so far as it can be explained to us, of the prophet's statement; for it was in the night in which he was betrayed, and immediately after he had instituted the ordinance of the Supper, —the night of his agony in the garden,—that he did himself declare that this prediction was about to be fulfilled. "All ye," said he, "shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad."

The exposition, though very feeble, which I have thus attempted to give of the mysterious words of this prophecy, can hardly fail to suggest some very solemn practical reflections. It must be evident, indeed, to every one who reads these words with attention, and in connection with what is elsewhere stated in Scripture in reference to the same subject, that in the counsels

of divine wisdom for the salvation of sinners, the first and most important concern was the vindication of the divine law, the maintenance of its authority, the full satisfaction of all its demands. Unless provision had been made for thus honouring the law, no mercy could have been extended to sinners. The plan of salvation, then, is from first to last a holy plan. Many hold in it a secondary and subordinate place. Its first and fundamental provision, without which it never could have proceeded or been consummated, was a provision for the claims of holiness and justice,—a condition which, if not fulfilled, must have rendered the exercise of mercy to sinners utterly impossible. And, oh! what a fearful doctrine should this be to those who are seeking to find some ground of hope towards God in a vague, indefinite, and strange combination of pleas,—their own reformation or repentance, the work of Christ, and,—as if both these were somewhat doubtful, and not entirely to be confided in,—the mercy of God, which, as they understand it, is a most accommodating principle, capable of extending itself so as to comprehend all cases, and to make up not only for the deficiencies of man's obedience, but for the defects, as they must suppose, of Christ's satisfaction. Did they speak out, and plainly say what is the ground on which they reckon for future happiness, or rather I should say, for deliverance from future punishment, it would be found that the reason for the hope that is in them is threefold. First, they are very decent and decorous in their bearing towards religion, as they call it, very honest in their dealings, and very kind in their feelings toward their fellow-men. Secondly, Christ has died for sinners, and has thereby rendered the law of God less severe, and more easily satisfied,—that is, has made it indulgent to sin. And, thirdly, God is very merciful, and will have mercy on them. Were they questioned more closely, I doubt not it would be found that they are resting on the first of these reasons, I mean their own irreproachable character, as they think it, more than on the second,—I mean the death of Christ; and that they are trusting to the third,—that is, the mercy of God, —still more than to either of the others, or even to both of them together. But where is there any fixed principle in this strange and confused mixture of principles? What kind of moral government is that which can deal out rewards and punishments on

grounds so loose, so indefinite, so arbitrary? What attribute of the divine nature could be honoured by a procedure so uncertain, so capricious as this? Nay, what attribute of his nature would not thereby be dishonoured? Oh that sinners would but see that mercy, considered as forgiving sin, and acquitting the sinner, is not an essential attribute of God! God is not bound by the necessity of his nature to be merciful in this sense, as he is bound to be holy, and just, and righteous, and good. He is, indeed, merciful beyond all that created imagination can conceive; for his mercy prompted him to give his own Son to the death for sinners. But even in this, his mercy was subordinate to his rectitude and truth; and in the application of this mercy, the claims of his justice occupy the first place. He forgives the sinner on most definite, most specific grounds. Either I am in Christ, or I am not. If I am in Christ, then I stand before God, clothed in a perfect righteousness,—a righteousness which he has himself accepted, and by which his law acknowledges itself to have been magnified and made honourable. I am, therefore, acquitted with the full consent of the law itself, not on the ground of mercy, but on the ground of righteousness. If I am not in Christ, then I am under condemnation; and to attempt getting up a variety of pleas whereon to rest my case, confessing that I cannot confidently reckon on any one of them, is a most miserable delusion, a vain and most unholy attempt to set aside the plainest and most precise declarations of the law of God,—a law as simple in its terms as it is unchangeably holy in its principle. And if the plan of salvation thus sets out with guarding and providing for the claims of holiness, so it also ends. The pardon of sinners is the commencement of the application of Christ's redemption to them; their sanctification, their being made perfect in personal holiness, is the end or consummation of it. If any man be in Christ, not only is there no condemnation for him, but he becomes a new creature,—old things are passed away, and all things are become new; so that as there was and could be no pardon to the guilty till the demands of the divine law were satisfied, till the holiness of God was asserted and vindicated, so the sinner's salvation cannot be completed till his conformity to the divine law be perfected; for without holiness "no man shall see the Lord."

And if these views of the plan of salvation be scriptural, then

in what a marvellous light do they exhibit the love of God to sinners! The greater the difficulty in reconciling the pardon of the guilty with the demands of God's holiness and justice, the more wonderful is the love which triumphed over that difficulty. If we could suppose that there was a time when the idea of saving sinful men was first entertained in the counsels of heaven, we must see that the first subject to be disposed of was the momentous question, how the honour of the divine law could be sustained, if they against whom its sentence of condemnation had gone forth should be spared the execution of that sentence. The plan which was adopted in these counsels plainly teaches that there was but one alternative for the solution of this apparently insolvable question. Either sinners must be left to their fate, doomed to satisfy the law for themselves, which it would require an eternity to do,—or God must give up his Son, and the Son must willingly give up himself, to the endurance of that curse which the law declares is the wages of sin. There could be no other alternative, else the eternal Word, the Son of God, the only begotten and well beloved of the Father, never had been placed in circumstances where he was constrained to say, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." And what was the result of this eternal counsel? what alternative was adopted on this momentous question? This passage, as we have seen, answers the question. The Father's decision was,—"Deliver them from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom;" and the Son's reply was, "Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God." However much, then, the holiness, and justice, and rectitude of God exceed our highest conceptions, and however overwhelming may be the contemplation of these attributes of the divine nature, equally large,—equally inconceivable,—equally overwhelming ought to be the love of God the Father in proposing, the love of the Son in undertaking, and the love of the Spirit in applying to sinners the great salvation which was devised in the counsels of eternal wisdom, and, in the fulness of time, was wrought out by the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is only from some right apprehension of the inflexible justice of God that sinners can be brought to entertain any right apprehension of his love. The one is the

measure of the other, for they are both divine, and, therefore, both infinite and unchangeable.

And in this view of the subject, how rich, how inexhaustibly rich in consolation is the marvellous statement in the passage before us! It is, indeed, an awful statement to the formalist, the hypocrite, the self-righteous, and the unbelieving; for to all such it plainly and very solemnly says, in regard to the mysterious sufferings of Christ, If these things are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? But to broken-hearted, humble, contrite, penitent sinners, I know no statement of Scripture that ought to be more precious and more full of consolation. It sets before them a plain, a sure, a solid ground of hope towards God. They are not left to cast about in doubt, and darkness, and perplexity for a resting-place. They are not left to seek comfort, to-day in some self-complacent idea of their own irreproachable character, or to-morrow in the thought of Christ's death as having lowered the standard and softened the sternness of the divine law, or next day in some confused and unworthy notion of God's mercy, as overlooking their infirmities, and dealing gently by their sins. The passage tells them of a most definite and precise foundation whereon to build their hope. It tells them that the law put forth all its demands and exhausted all its penalty on Him in whom they are confiding, and to whom they are anxious to cleave. Their surety has suffered all that the law required of them. The sentence under which they lay has been executed upon Him. He has encountered the flaming sword that barred their access to the tree of life. It was not turned aside to spare Him, and he turned not aside to avoid its stroke. He met and endured the stroke, but he, notwithstanding, reached the life-giving tree; and in his broken body and shed blood he gives them the fruit thereof, that they may eat and live for ever.

LXXI.

"AND HE SHALL SIT AS A REFINER."

MALACHI III. 3.

THIS passage refers to Christ, whose appearing is predicted in the first verse. That prediction had a reference to the two classes of persons of whom the Jewish people consisted,—namely, those who really were, and those who hypocritically professed to be the people of God; and it was a prediction, therefore, both of blessing and of judgment. The character of the Jews generally, in the time of Malachi, is very fully brought out in the message which he was commissioned to deliver to them, and which is recorded in this book; and when we compare what he has said of them with what is said in the concluding chapter of Nehemiah, we should infer that both referred to nearly the same, or precisely the same period. At all events, there could be no long interval between the time of Nehemiah and that at which Malachi prophesied. We have thus the means of determining not only the character of the Jews, but the circumstances in which they were placed when the prophet was sent to them. They had returned from the Babylonish captivity, agreeably to the promise recorded by the prophet Jeremiah, and had not only rebuilt the temple at Jerusalem, after repeated interruptions, and in the face of many difficulties, but they had also, under the guidance and direction of Nehemiah, built again the wall of Jerusalem, and set up the gates thereof; and while "the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem, the rest of the people

also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities, ... every one in his possession in their cities." Provision, also, had been made by Ezra, the priest, for the reading of the law and the observance of divine ordinances; and all they who had knowledge and understanding entered into a covenant, saying, We will "walk in God's law," and "observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;" "and we will not forsake the house of our God."

But solemnly and apparently sincere as this covenant transaction was, it very soon appeared, in regard to many, perhaps the greater number, that "their heart was not right" with God, "neither were they steadfast in his covenant," and that, like their fathers, "they tempted God, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?" They did not, indeed, return to outward acts of idolatry, which had been the besetting sin of their fathers from the beginning; for it appears that after the seventy years' captivity in Babylon, their defection from God no longer assumed the form of idolatrous worship. But they broke their covenant engagements notwithstanding; for we find Nehemiah complaining that on his second return to Jerusalem, he found that the courts of God's house had been defiled,—that the house itself, and the service thereof, had been forsaken,—that "the Levites and the singers that did the work were fled every one to his field,"—that the Sabbath of the Lord was profaned by ungodly traffic,—and that many of the Jews had formed unholy alliances with the heathen around them. By the exertions of Nehemiah, an outward reform, at least, was effected on all these points; and we cannot doubt that his labours were blessed also for a real, spiritual reformation to many. But with regard to the people generally, and especially the priests and Levites, the reform was only outward; for the substance of the message with which Malachi was sent to them was to charge them with formality and hypocrisy. He did not accuse them of altogether neglecting or avowedly profaning the ordinances of God. But he charged them with really profaning these ordinances, inasmuch as they offered polluted bread on God's altar, and brought for sacrifices out of their flocks that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick,—thus offering a corrupt thing unto the Lord, and plainly showing that his ser-

vice was to them a weariness, and his table a contemptible thing; while to the priests he was commanded to say, "Ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts."

But the point to which I would especially advert, as bearing upon the verse under consideration, is the presumptuous self-righteousness which the Jews cherished amidst all this defection. Hollow and hypocritical as all their professions were, and polluted as was the service which they did formally offer, they evidently thought that in consequence of that service they were entitled to expect many more tokens of the divine favour than they had yet received, and that they were unjustly dealt with because they were still subjected to manifold hardships, from which even the heathen themselves were exempted, and because God had not fulfilled all the great and glorious things which former prophets had foretold would be fulfilled, when the Lord should turn again the captivity of Judah. They never once dreamt of their own sins being the cause of their sufferings, or the reason why they were not so prosperous as they expected to be after their return to the land of their fathers. On the contrary, they are represented by the prophet as asserting that the fault lay not with them,—that they had received no favour at the hand of God for which they had not made an adequate return of gratitude and submission,—nay, that the Lord showed greater kindness to evil doers, the heathen who feared him not, than to them, though they had wrought righteousness. "I have loved you, saith the Lord: yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? .... A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? .... Ye have wearied the Lord with your words: yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him?" Ye have wearied him by saying, "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them," —or by saying, "Where is the God of judgment?" Such was the daring length to which the Jews had carried their murmuring against God. They actually charged him with favouring the

ungodly, while they, his people who served him, were left to suffer; and they called upon him to appear as the God of judgment or righteousness, as if they had nothing to fear and every thing to hope for from his manifesting himself in that character "Where," said they, "is the God of judgment?" And it was in answer to this question, this presumptuous demand, that the prophet foretold Christ's coming in the passage before us: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in," or so greatly desire: "behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."

It appears, then, that this prediction concerning Christ's coming was designed to be a solemn warning to those to whom it was addressed. They earnestly longed for the appearing of the Messiah,—the Deliverer promised from the beginning, and foretold to their fathers by the prophets, in language which implied that his kingdom was to surpass in glory all that Israel had ever witnessed in the brightest days of their prosperity. Not only did they long for the coming of this glorious person, but they complained that his appearing was delayed, as if they were thereby aggrieved; because, in their self-righteousness, they believed that the purpose of his coming could only be to exalt them, and to humble the heathen, who had long oppressed them, and to whom they were still in some respects in subjection. The prophet, therefore, assured them, that he whom they thus looked and longed for, and in the prospect of whose coming they delighted, would assuredly come, but that they had greater reason to be alarmed than to rejoice in that day: "Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" The warning is similar to that which the prophet Amos addressed to Israel in his day: "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light." But while, to many of the Jews,—perhaps the greater part,—the prediction of Christ's coming was thus a threatening of judgment, there were others,—a remnant of true

believers, as there always was, even in the worst times,—to whom that prediction was a promise of unspeakable blessing. For we are told, in a subsequent part of this chapter, that while the hypocritical and self-righteous were saying, "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" —"they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

The verse under consideration refers to Christ, whose appearing is predicted in the first verse, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap." This prediction had a reference to the two classes of persons of which the Jewish people consisted, namely, those who really were, and those who merely pretended to be the people of God. It was a prediction, therefore, both of blessing and of judgment,—of blessing, to those who stood the test to which all were to be subjected,—and of judgment, to those who were tried and found wanting. And, accordingly, we find it renewed in the following chapter, in language the most consolatory and encouraging: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." In what way, then, was the prediction in the passage we are considering fulfilled, in respect to both the classes of persons to whom it was addressed? To the one class it was a solemn warning of judgment, to the other a promise of blessing. When our Lord appeared, the spiritual state and religious character of the Jews were little, if at all, better than in the time of Malachi, when this prediction of his appearance was uttered, and we may expect, therefore, to find that it was fulfilled just as it was delivered. But, at first sight, it may appear to have been otherwise. Christ, indeed, appeared,—the Lord

whom the Jews sought, saying, "Where is the God of judgment?" or righteousness, did come suddenly to his temple,—even the messenger of the covenant, in the prospect of whose coming they delighted. But his appearing was accompanied with no visible execution of judgment against the proud and self-righteous; nor did the humble, those that feared the Lord, and spake often one to another, experience any great outward deliverance. The prediction, however, was fulfilled in all its depth and extent of meaning, and in a manner full of the most solemn and important instruction to all in subsequent times; for while to those who feared the name of the Lord, Christ's coming was the rising of the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings, it might truly be said in regard to others, "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."

The figurative language here applied by the prophet to Christ, when he compares him to a refiner's fire and fuller's soap, and calls him "a refiner and purifier of silver," is repeatedly used in Scripture to describe the effects of God's dealings, both in the way of judgment with hypocrites and unbelievers, and in the way of fatherly chastisement and kindness towards his own people. Thus, by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord said to Israel, "Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the Lord have poured out my fury upon you." And, on the other hand, we find the prophet Zechariah thus speaking concerning the true Israel, "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God."

These predictions express, in substance, what the passage under

consideration represents as the effect of Christ's appearing,—namely, that trying and sifting process whereby the false Israel were to be separated from the true, and both prepared for the respective states which finally awaited them. To both classes he was to be like a refiner's fire; and the result, as stated in a subsequent verse, was to be, "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." So in like manner was it foretold of him in the temple by Simeon, when he took him in his arms, and said, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." And to the same effect is the testimony of the Baptist, when he said, "I indeed baptize you with water; . . . . but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." None of these predictions meant that Messiah was to appear for the execution of outward and visible judgment on hypocrites and unbelievers, and for working out an equally palpable deliverance for those that really feared the Lord. But they did mean that the time of Messiah's coming was to be a sifting time,—a time of such a trial as hypocrites could not abide, while the same trial was to purify and prepare God's people for the inheritance of glory which was prepared for them. And in regard, then, to the first of these, namely, the trial of the ungodly, the prediction was fulfilled; for from the day that Christ was manifested to Israel, by entering on his public ministry, he sat as a refiner and purifier of silver. No sooner did he begin to exhibit the divine excellence of his character, and to announce his pure and heavenly doctrine, than hypocrites took the alarm, and began to manifest the terror and the hatred which his presence awakened. Their enmity to God and holiness, which had been concealed from others under a plausible profession,—even of zeal for God's glory,—and their unconquerable aversion to every thing truly spiritual, which they had contrived to hide from themselves by substituting a rigorous observance of outward rites for the homage of the heart and affections,—these

ungodly principles of the carnal mind were aroused and called into activity by seeing the spotless holiness of the Saviour's character, and hearing the divine truths which formed the subject of his teaching. Those, especially, who had manifested the most ardent desire for the observance of divine ordinances, and who stood highest in the estimation of their fellow-men as religious professors, were the first to shrink from coming into close contact with what was truly spiritual and holy, and were the most deeply agitated and alarmed by the presence of Christ among them. They could not bear to contemplate the purity, and rectitude, and excellence of the divine character, as exhibited by Christ, both in his person and in his preaching. His word was so offensive to them that they could neither suppress nor conceal the enmity which it awakened. Neither could they make their escape from it. God manifest in the flesh was in the midst of them, speaking as never man spake, and doing the works which none other man ever did. They were compelled to hear the immediate revelation of the divine will spoken by the mouth of the Son of God himself, and to see the divine purity and holiness manifested in his person; and the effect is most emphatically expressed by our Lord, when he says, "Now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." Often do we read in the previous history of Israel of their being subjected to a similar sifting, by the presence of prophets among them, in whose mouth the word of the Lord was as a fire that burneth; and the result of such trials was to call forth into greater activity the enmity of ungodly men to the truth, and to reveal the true character of the hypocrite and the unbeliever. But never had they been subjected to such a trying process as that through which they passed when the Son of God appeared among them, —when they felt themselves near one in whose character there was nothing but what was most offensive to the carnal mind,— and when there was nothing to restrain or to lay asleep their hatred of that holiness, the sight of which they felt to be intolerable. They were, indeed, brought into the refiner's fire, from which there was no escape till their true character was determined and made manifest. And it was manifested in a very fearful manner. Every new display of our Lord's divine excellence served only to give increased bitterness to their malignity;

they felt it more and more necessary every day to rid themselves of one whose presence was so hateful to them. Like their fathers, who said concerning the prophets, "Come, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be no more remembered," they frequently "took counsel together to put him to death;" and when his hour was come,—when the unseen restraint, which had hitherto prevented them from working all their will, was removed,—they filled up the measure of their fathers' iniquity; and they showed what the carnal mind really is, and what it would do if it had the power, when they took and with wicked hands crucified and slew the Lord of glory.

It was thus, I conceive, that the prediction in the passage before us was fulfilled by our Lord's appearing, in so far as concerned the hypocritical and finally impenitent among the Jews. By his appearing, they were brought into the refiner's fire, where they were separated as dross from the silver, and prepared for the fate which awaited them, and which was afterwards typically represented by the destruction of Jerusalem. It was not our Lord's appearing among them that made them what they were. No doubt, his appearing was the occasion of their guilt being unspeakably aggravated, insomuch that he himself said of them, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin." But they were hypocrites, who cloaked their sin under a profession of religion, before Christ came and spoke to them; and if he had not appeared in their day, they might have continued through life to maintain that profession, and to have enjoyed the reputation of men who feared God, without having ever manifested that enmity to God and holiness which was called forth by the presence of Christ. But that enmity was in their heart, and was known by our Lord to be there, before it was so called forth; and though it had not been made manifest to men by any outward expression of hatred to Christ, or any act of violence to his person, yet it would have been awakened within them, and would have gathered strength and bitterness, from their being brought into contact with him, and constrained to contemplate the holiness of his character, and to hear the heavenly truths which he uttered. He would thus have been to them as a refiner's fire, trying them, and proving them to be dross, or reprobate silver, even though

outwardly they had not been excited to any act of hostility against him and against his cause.

And thus Christ still sits as a refiner and purifier of silver, and is as a refiner's fire to all impenitent men and hypocritical professors. The carnal mind cannot come into contact with the truth without having its enmity stirred; and there have never been wanting, in all ages, instances in abundance in which that enmity, when so awakened, has manifested itself in openly-avowed hatred of holiness, and in acts of violent hostility against those who maintained the truth, and who reflected the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. But even where there is no such avowed enmity to the truth, or such open hostility to those who hold it, yet, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, it subjects men to a trial, by which their feelings towards God and divine things are called into exercise, and which determines what the nature of these feelings is. Unregenerate men must be conscious, that when they seriously entertain the truth at all,—when they read or hear of Christ, of his person, and character, and work,—his gracious invitations to sinners to come to him for the rest which they are seeking in vain elsewhere,—the necessity of denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily, and following him,—and the claim which he has on their love, and gratitude, and submission; —when unregenerate men do at any time seriously entertain these truths, they must be conscious that there is in their heart a feeling of dislike to them,—that they feel the subject to be offensive,—and that the truth discloses to them an enmity in their hearts against God which they did not before suspect to be there. They must be conscious, too, that the more solemnly that they ponder the subject, the more do they discover of the strength of that enmity; and if it is not subdued, it must continue to gather strength. It is thus that Christ is trying them by his Word, and showing them what is in their heart; and who can tell to what extremity their hatred of the truth might be carried, if they could not make their escape from it, but were compelled, as the Jews were in our Lord's time, to contemplate the unspotted holiness and purity of the divine character? But they do often contrive to withdraw themselves from what they feel to be supremely offensive. If they cannot forget the subject altogether, they may find a refuge in the mere formalities of a

religious profession. They may, without any great sacrifice of worldly gratifications, bring themselves to observe all that is needful to maintain such a profession. They may thus shut out all solemn thoughts of God's presence, by the very rites and ordinances in which they appear to be drawing near to him. And they may conclude that their heart does not harbour any real hatred or enmity against God, because they have succeeded in resisting the entrance of any such thoughts of him as would awaken that enmity. But what can the effect of such a profession be, but to harden the heart and deaden the conscience? The natural enmity of the carnal mind remains unsubdued; and if it is not felt, it is only because convictions have been stifled, and sin has established its undisputed power over the inner man. But however this hardening process may be concealed from sinners themselves, it is seen by Him who sits as a refiner of silver, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and of whom all the churches shall know that it is He which searcheth the reins and hearts, and will give unto every one according to his works.

But while the trial to which Christ thus subjects all who hear the Gospel serves, in regard to unbelievers and hypocrites, to excite, and call forth, and strengthen the enmity of their carnal mind, it is by the same trial that he softens and subdues the hearts of his own people,—melts them into godly sorrow and contrition,—and moulds them into an entire conformity to his own blessed image. Originally they differ not from those of whom we have been speaking, being "by nature the children of wrath even as others," "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them," and enemies to him in their hearts by wicked works. They may remember when this was really their condition, and will acknowledge, therefore, that they know from experience what the apostle means, when he says that "the carnal mind is enmity against God." The resistance, too, which their heart made to the entrance of the truth may have been as obstinate, and the struggle which they made against it may for a time have been as painful, as in the case of those by whom the truth is finally and for ever rejected. This must have been especially true of those who, during our Lord's manifestation in the flesh, were brought to believe on him as the Christ, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. They, too, like other men,

were estranged from God, and could hardly avoid being infected with that spirit of self-righteousness which characterised their countrymen generally; and to them, therefore, the doctrine which taught the necessity of a Saviour for their acceptance with God, and of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to qualify them for the enjoyment of the divine favour and fellowship, must have been a peculiarly humbling doctrine. But even when brought to understand and believe this truth, there remained a sore trial for them to pass through, before they could be reconciled to the doctrine of a suffering Messiah. Christ crucified was, and still continues to be, to the unbelieving Jews, a stumbling-block; and the Gospel history testifies that it was the truth which the first disciples were slowest of heart to understand, and the most unwilling to believe. They were at an early period convinced that Jesus was the Christ, and the peace which his blessed doctrine imparted to their souls taught them, in their happy experience, that he had the words of eternal life. Still, even with this conviction, how long was it before they were reconciled to the necessity of his being crucified and put to death! And when they could no longer resist it,—when they actually beheld him an unresisting victim in the hands of his ferocious enemies, condemned to death, led away as a lamb to the slaughter, and afterwards laid in the grave,—how terrible was the fiery trial through which they passed, and how well-nigh had their faith failed them during that mysterious period! Truly Christ was to them as the refiner's fire. But the trial through which they passed was not to destroy, but to purify. It was necessary to purge away all their dross. Their heart and affections were still set on a temporal inheritance, from which they needed to be detached. The hope of worldly honours and distinctions, which had taken possession of their minds, required to be extinguished, if ever they were to experience the joy and consolation which flow from the hope of a heavenly inheritance. They had, from the beginning, experienced much of their Master's love; and, from the beginning, they loved him in return. But they knew not the infinite depth of his love, till they saw what he endured for their sakes; nor did they discover how little they had loved him, till it was disclosed to them in the hour of trial, when, instead of being ready to follow him to prison and to death,

they all forsook him and fled. Often before had he exercised towards them great compassion and tenderness in correcting their misapprehensions and bearing with their infirmities. But they knew comparatively little of that divine compassion till after his resurrection, when, notwithstanding their faithless desertion of him in the season of his suffering, he manifested himself to them with all his former kindness and condescension,—graciously removing all the doubts which they might have been ready to entertain,—showing "himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." They had, indeed, been brought into the furnace; but it was necessary that they should, if ever they were to make these important discoveries regarding themselves, and these precious discoveries of the grace, and love, and tenderness of the Saviour. And the blessed effects of this refining and purifying process were afterwards manifested in their devotedness to Christ, and in their growing resemblance to him, when they rejoiced and gave thanks that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, and when men "took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

And such, in substance, is Christ's manner of dealing with all his people, in regard to whom he still sits as a refiner and purifier of silver. It is necessary for all that they make the same discoveries, both of themselves and of Christ, that the first disciples did, and that they should undergo essentially the same change which passed upon them. But such discoveries cannot be made, and such a change cannot pass upon them, without a painful struggle on their part. When Christ, by his Word and Spirit, first discloses to them their true state in relation to God, —convincing them that they are guilty and condemned,—their first attempt will be to stifle the conviction; for until they have some apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, such a conviction can only awaken hard thoughts of God, as if he were dealing unjustly and harshly by them, and, therefore, could only excite their enmity against him. But the bitterness of this discovery will not pass away even when they have been made to see, and in some measure to feel the love of God in Christ. By such a manifestation of the grace and mercy of God to their souls, they may be delivered from the tormenting dread of divine

wrath, and the enmity of their carnal mind may be slain. But this discovery of the divine character, as revealed in the Gospel, will serve to give them a deeper insight into their own. So long as they contended with their convictions of guilt, and laboured to dismiss their apprehensions of danger, they had no right sense of sin,—no perception of its deformity and demerit,—no real conviction that it deserved the wrath and curse of God. It is in the cross of Christ that they first see the true character of sin, as it appears in the sight of God; and it is then only that they see the extent of their own sinfulness, and acknowledge the justice of the sentence which the law passes upon transgressors,—the judgment which has come upon them to condemnation. Formerly they sought to palliate their offences, because they really regarded sin as a very light and trivial thing, which they willingly believed that God in mere pity would pass by, and would not visit with the punishment which he has denounced against it. But now they find it more difficult to believe that he can and will pardon them, than they formerly did to believe that he would punish them; and though they see in the death of Christ a sure ground laid for the justification of sinners, in a way perfectly consistent with the rectitude and holiness of God, yet they may doubt, and continue long to doubt, whether it be a ground of hope to them,—whether with guilt like theirs they can venture to look for mercy,—whether there is not something peculiar in their case which shuts them out from a participation in blessings that are freely offered to all.

But dark and perplexing as their condition may be, their conscience will justify God. They will admit that he has said and threatened nothing against them which they do not deserve. They will feel convinced that even if they should perish for ever, they would perish justly. And herein it is that their convictions of sin differ from those of the hypocrite and finally impenitent sinner, whose enmity to God is only irritated and strengthened by such convictions. However depressed, therefore, and discouraged they may be, they will not arraign the divine rectitude, nor charge God foolishly; neither will they look to any other quarter for enlargement and relief than to the love, and compassion, and power of the Saviour. And if he leave them for a season, it may be a long season, in this state of darkness and doubt, it is not be-

cause he is unwilling that they should become partakers of everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, but because he would have them participate in these blessings more largely than they would have done if they had not thus been brought into and kept in the furnace. It is only by this deep insight into the extent and aggravated nature of their guilt that they are prepared to appreciate the infinite value of the atonement that has been made for it, and the healing efficacy of that blood which pacifies their conscience. It is thus, also, that they discover the malignity and hatefulness of sin, and are made to feel the necessity of being purified from its pollution, as well as cleansed from its guilt. And when they are enabled to cast themselves on the Saviour, and to commit their all to him, believing that he undertakes for them, how glorious is the discovery which they make of the marvellous provision that has been made for all the necessities of their condition! And how will they bless God even for the fiery trial through which they passed, and by which their natural enmity against God, their pride, their self-righteousness, and their love of sin, have been so far purged away as no longer to stand between them and Christ, or prevent them experiencing a sense of God's forgiving mercy! By thus subjecting them to the refiner's fire, the operation of his Holy Spirit by the Word, Christ not only disposes and enables them to take refuge in his righteousness for pardon and acceptance with God, but he thus prepares them, also, for receiving the impress of his own divine image. The work of sanctification is then begun, and, by the ordinances of his grace and the dispensations of his providence, it will be carried on; for having once brought them into the furnace, he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he will "purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness."

The last clause of the verse before us, as originally addressed to the Jews, had obviously a reference to what we find stated in the preceding chapter concerning the priests, who are especially charged with having contributed largely to the defection of the people. "For the priest's lips," says the prophet, "should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye

have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts." The prediction, therefore, regarding the sons of Levi, may be considered generally as a promise to the people of God, the true Israel, that Christ at his coming would provide for the right administration of the ordinances of his grace, and would greatly bless them for the comfort and edification of his people. And viewed simply in this light, it is a very precious promise ; for it is a promise that Christ will be present in his ordinances to all who really and earnestly seek him there. No ordinances can avail any thing if Christ is not in them, and the promise, therefore, of their being rendered effectual for building up believers in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation, is a promise that Christ will meet with his people there to bless them and to do them good. But there is more in the verse we are considering, I think, than merely this general promise. It reminds us of the character and privileges which the New Testament declares are common to all true believers,—namely, that they are kings and priests unto God. "Ye also," says the apostle Peter, "as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. . . . . Unto you therefore which believe he is precious," as the chief corner-stone in Zion: "but unto them which be disobedient, ... a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. . . . . But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." By the sons of Levi, then, we may understand all true believers; and of them it is said that Christ will purify them, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. The sons of Levi were set apart from the other tribes of Israel expressly for the service of God, and the application of this name or title, therefore, to believers, does most emphatically express their separation from a world lying in sin, and their devotedness to Him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. It is in their effectual calling that they are so separated, when, by the operation of the Holy Spirit on their heart, they are quickened to a sense of their state before God,—convinced of their sin and misery,—made to feel that unless they escape from their state of guilt and condem-

nation, they are undone for ever,—constrained to look about for some refuge or hiding-place from the wrath to come,—have their minds so enlightened in the knowledge of Christ as to see that he is the only Saviour of the guilty, and the very Saviour who is suited to them,—feel the enmity of their minds to God melting and giving way before the manifestation of the divine love,—and, finally, are persuaded and enabled to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to them in the Gospel. Then it is that they are themselves accepted as righteous before God, and, therefore, in a state for offering to him an offering in righteousness. But the promise farther assures them, that by the continued operation of the Holy Spirit in his sanctifying power, they shall be separated more and more from a sinful world, and that as Christ has redeemed them from all iniquity, so he will purify them unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. The language of the passage before us, as well as the whole tenor of Scripture, plainly intimates that this purifying process may be a painful one. But can it be otherwise, where the willing slaves of sin and Satan, miserable captives in love with their bondage, are to be set free, and translated into the glorious liberty of the sons of God? It is the desperate depravity of the heart that renders the work of conviction and conversion so painful, and often so protracted a one, and it is the remaining corruption which lurks there that requires the application of sharp discipline in the progress of sanctification. But however painful the process may be, it will ever be a precious truth to God's people, that Christ sits as a refiner and purifier of silver, purifying the sons of Levi, and purging them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

LXXII.

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MALACHI IV. 2.

At the beginning of the preceding chapter, we have a prediction of Christ's appearing, wherein he is compared to "a refiner's fire," and to "fullers' soap," and in which it is foretold of him that he should "sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." This mode of representing Christ, like every other prediction of him in the Old Testament Scriptures, had a reference to the peculiar condition and character of the visible Church at the time. The view of Christ and of his office which is presented to us in that prediction, is still full of the richest consolation to his people, and of solemn warning to unbelievers, and will continue to be so in every age of the Church. But it is one of the many examples of the divine wisdom which shines in every page of Scripture, that while the predictions of the prophets concerning Christ were such as to exhibit him to the Church, in every subsequent age, in all the majesty and glory of his divine character, and in all the fulness of his grace and truth as the Saviour of sinners, these predictions were expressed in such language, and illustrated by such figures and symbols, as we might suppose would have been employed if they had been designed exclusively for the reproof or the consolation of the Church at the time that they were uttered. And this is very obviously so in regard to the prediction at the beginning of the preceding chapter, where Christ is represented as "a refiner and purifier of silver,"—that is, as

one who separates the dross from the precious metal. At the time when this prediction was delivered, the visible Church,—that is to say, the Jewish people,—presented outwardly a fair appearance in regard to a religious profession. The temple had been rebuilt, and the ordinances thereof were observed with some degree, at least, of regularity and external decency. They were thus distinguished from the heathen around them, inasmuch as they professedly worshipped the true God; and, therefore, in their own estimation, they alone were entitled to any tokens of the divine favour, or any interpositions of divine power on their behalf. In the figurative language of the prophet, they thought themselves pure silver. But a large portion of them, perhaps by far the greater portion, and those, too, who did more confidently claim to be exclusively God's people, were but dross, or reprobate silver. Even their outward services, on which alone they relied, for they knew nothing of a spiritual service, were an abomination in the sight of God, inasmuch as they offered polluted bread upon his altar; for they brought to him for sacrifice "that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick," and they robbed him "in tithes and offerings." And while there was nothing spiritual in their services, so they cared nothing for spiritual blessings. Haggai and Zechariah had laboured to discourage their hopes of worldly power and authority as a nation, and to inculcate more spiritual views of the prophecies concerning Messiah, while every thing in God's dealings with them plainly intimated that he had never promised them that temporal ascendancy over the heathen nations which, from their false interpretation of these prophecies, they fancied that he had promised. But they held fast by their carnal views and expectations. Nothing would satisfy them but the fulfilment of the prophecies in the sense in which they chose to understand them. They held that if this was not granted, God had dealt unfaithfully by them,—that he made no difference between them and the heathen; nay, that the latter were more the objects of his favour than his own people were. "Every one," said they, "that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; where is the God of judgment?"

By this last presumptuous demand, they referred to the coming of Messiah, who, as they supposed, was promised as the

restorer of all the former power and supremacy of Israel as a people, and in the delay of whose coming, therefore, they felt themselves aggrieved. Messiah's coming was, accordingly, foretold again, and in such terms, and by such a figure, as ought to have filled them with fear and trembling. They were assured that He whose coming they longed for, or rather presumptuously demanded, would appear, and that in him God would be revealed as the God of judgment or righteousness, showing that he did make a difference between the righteous and the wicked, and that he did so to their confusion and dismay: "Behold, the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." He whose coming they longed and loudly called for was thus to subject them to a trial by which their true character would be brought fully into view, and a separation made between the righteous and the wicked,—the silver and the dross. But the separation was not to set them above the heathen, as they proudly and confidently expected. On the contrary, there would then begin to be fulfilled what the prophet had previously foretold as recorded in the first chapter, and what it would appear had grievously offended them: "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." But the first separation, when Christ appeared, was to be between them, the carnal and self-righteous of the Jews, God's professing people, and the humble, the contrite, "the hidden ones," those "that feared the Lord," and "spake often one to another." And the result of this searching fiery trial, which was to terminate so disastrously for those who presumptuously called for it, is stated in the last verse of the preceding chapter: "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

Such, then, was to be the effect of Christ's coming, in disclos-

ing and bringing clearly out the true character of the Jews,—especially in exposing the ungodly and carnal spirit of those who, on the strength of their self-righteousness, presumptuously claimed to be in a peculiar manner the people of God. Christ, indeed, did not actually appear to that generation to which Malachi prophesied. But he virtually appeared in the person of the prophet; for the prophet told them what their true character was, just as Christ would have proved it to be if he had appeared personally among them. And when Christ did appear, he found the Jews, in point of character, essentially the same as they were in the time of Malachi; for nobody, I think, can read the four short chapters of this book, in connection with any one of the Gospel histories, without perceiving that the same self-righteous spirit characterised the Jews at both periods, and that if Malachi had lived at the time that Christ was to appear,—as, indeed, he may be said to have done in the person of John the Baptist,—he would have described the character of his countrymen just as we find him doing in the chapters before us. And, accordingly, when Christ came, he was to the Jews what he would have been to the men of Malachi's time. In the reception which his heavenly doctrine met with, and in the treatment which he personally experienced, the character of the proud and self-righteous was brought out as it had never been before,—even that enmity of the carnal mind against God which could be satisfied with nothing less than crucifying and slaying the Lord of glory. And not less truly did the prophet describe the character of the hidden ones of our Lord's time, when he represents them as "they that feared the Lord," and "spake often one to another." Well can we conceive that the few, comparatively few, who believed that Jesus was the Son of God, and who felt that he had the words of eternal life, must have "spoken often one to another;" for what sympathy could they have found, in regard to the subject which lay nearest their heart, from the proud, self-righteous Pharisee, the scoffing Sadducee, or degraded multitude,—the slaves of ignorance, the victims of false teaching,—who raised the hideous cry, "Crucify him, crucify him?"

In the all but universal rejection of Christ by the Jewish people, in the contempt and reproach to which he meekly submitted at their hand, and, above all, in his mysterious suffer-

ings and death, there was much to perplex and disturb those humble and believing ones, in whose hearts there had been awakened towards him a love which they never felt and never could feel towards any other. And with what eagerness, then, would they search out those who were like-minded with themselves, and with whom they might hold converse on the one engrossing subject of their hopes and their fears! We may be assured that the employment of the two disciples, as they journeyed towards Emmaus, on the day of the Lord's resurrection, and "talked together of all those things which had happened," was the employment also of the disciples generally in and about Jerusalem. And we can as little doubt that these two disciples did faithfully describe the sorrow and sadness of all their brethren, when, in language which implied that their faith and hope were well-nigh extinguished, they said, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." While thus giving utterance to their emotions, they had, though unknown to themselves, the privilege of the personal presence of the Lord with them, hearkening and hearing them, and their hearts burned within them while he opened to them the Scriptures. But though not visibly present in person, he hearkened and heard all his disconsolate followers, who were engaged, like the two, in speaking one to another, as he still hears all who delight to speak of him and of the decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem; and they were soon to know that though for a season they thought themselves forgotten and forsaken, yet "a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name;" and they have now fully realised in their blessed experience, as all like them will realise, the faithfulness of the gracious promise, "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

This promise is again renewed in the passage before us, where the prophet foretells the ultimate result of that separation which Messiah's coming was to make between the righteous and the wicked,—between him that served God and him that served him not. We have already seen, that when Christ appeared, the purity of his doctrine and the holiness of his character proved very searching to men, awakening the enmity of the carnal mind

against God, and bringing fully into view their true character and condition; while the lowly and contrite in spirit, they who had been made to feel their sin and misery, had some spiritual discernment given them to welcome Christ as their Deliverer; and though still involved in much darkness and perplexity, they beheld some rays of his glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." But the consequences of this separation between the righteous and the wicked were not fully developed during our Lord's sojourn on the earth. He came not to execute judgment even on the finally impenitent, nor to unfold to the humble and the believing the full extent of the blessings which he had procured for them. But judgment did, nevertheless, await the ungodly, and would assuredly overtake them; while there was in reserve for Christ's people a glorious manifestation of the divine favour and protection. Both are, accordingly, foretold in the passage before us, and are placed by contrast in a very striking point of view: "Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." We can hardly conceive that a threatening so terrible as this can be fully executed in the present life, or that the judgment threatened can be exhausted till that day which is emphatically the day of the Lord, when the divine retribution of men will be full and final, when a righteous sentence shall be passed on all, and when the ungodly shall be doomed to "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." And, in like manner, the promise here made to the righteous may not receive its full accomplishment till the same great day of the Lord, when they shall be received into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

Yet there was a day in the history of the Jews, and not long after the crucifixion of Christ,—indeed, in the lifetime of some who must have witnessed at least, if they did not take part in that atrocious deed,—a day in which the prediction before us, if not actually fulfilled in all its extent, received at least a partial accomplishment, and exhibited a terrible type, and a token,

too, of its certain and final fulfilment. I refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, called in Scripture "the day of the Lord," when the Jews, by their own infatuation, their presumptuous, self-righteous reckoning on the interposition of God on their behalf, and their delusive expectation of Messiah to assert and vindicate his own claim to the throne of David and their supremacy over the heathen, brought upon themselves an accumulation of suffering unexampled, perhaps, in the history of the world,—full as that history is of the horrors of private crime and of national wars. And while the unbelieving Jews did thus taste the bitterness of the curse which they imprecated upon themselves, when they said, "His blood be on us, and on our children," the faithful followers of Christ experienced a very marvellous interposition on their behalf, especially in being preserved from making shipwreck of their faith amidst the fierce trial that assailed them. They dwelt in the secret place of the Most High, and abode under the shadow of the Almighty. The contrast stated in the passage before us was thus very clearly brought out. The day foretold was to the proud, the impenitent, and the unbelieving, a day that did burn as an oven, even to burn up and consume; while to those who feared the Lord, and who thought upon his name, it was a day of quickening and of revival, by the rising upon them of the Sun of righteousness, for at that dismal season they had such a manifestation of the love, and faithfulness, and power of the Saviour, as they could not have had without the calamities which threatened to overwhelm them, in common with their unbelieving countrymen, in one universal ruin. In the prospect of that day, our Lord taught his disciples to pray that their flight might not be in the winter, neither on the Sabbath-day. "For then," said he, "shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." But along with this warning, there was the precious promise in the passage under consideration, to fortify and encourage them in the prospect of the day of trial. In that promise, wings are ascribed to the Sun of righteousness, implying generally the quickness, or rather I should say, at least in regard to Christ's people, the seasonableness of his appearing. To the impenitent and unbelieving, who to the last expected that Messiah would appear for their deliverance, and complained that he did

not, his coming was indeed quick or sudden,—the consequences of that coming being so different from what in their infatuation they looked for. And to the Church, Christ's faithful people, it was quick too. It might not, indeed, be so in their apprehension, and according to their calculation; for believers themselves, I fear, may sometimes give way to the feeling that God is "slack concerning his promise." And when we reflect what the believing Jews must have daily and hourly experienced at the hand of their unbelieving countrymen, the community at large, their former friends and associates, and the unbelieving members of their own families, we cannot doubt that their faith at times was ready to fail them, that they stood greatly in need of some manifestation of the divine power and faithfulness to strengthen and establish them, and that deliverance or relief might appear to them very long in coming. But it came quickly, notwithstanding, for it came seasonably,—that is, at such a time and in such a way as afforded a brighter display than they would otherwise have had of the Saviour's love, and faithfulness, and power. And so it will always be with his people. If they wait patiently for him, they will never be disappointed; nay, they will have cause to rejoice that the times and the seasons for their relief or enlargement are in his hands, and not in their own. And if they are impatient and fretful, they may only be protracting their season of trial; and when relief comes, as it assuredly will do, it will prove a sharp rebuke for their distrust in having doubted or disbelieved, or at least forgotten, the precious truth that the Lord is not only a help, but "a very present help in trouble."

The remarkable deliverance which was wrought for the Christians in Jerusalem, at the final destruction of that city, furnished a proof of the faithfulness of the promise in the passage before us, the more striking that it stood contrasted with the terrible ruin that overtook the impenitent and unbelieving, when wrath came upon them even unto the uttermost. But we are not to suppose that the mitigation or even entire removal of mere temporal suffering, formed the only or even the chief value of any gracious interposition which they experienced. Such an interposition was especially precious to them as a token of the Saviour's love,—a proof that he had been watching over them,—a

pledge that he would care for them still. With such a pledge and such an assurance, they were ready to encounter any worldly tribulation, even death itself, not accepting deliverance, when offered to them by man, on terms that were inconsistent with their allegiance to Christ. Any deliverance that they experienced confirmed to them the faithfulness of the promise, "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

I have already adverted to one idea conveyed by this figurative language, wherein wings are ascribed to the Sun of righteousness, as intimating the quickness or the seasonableness of the Saviour's interposition on behalf of his people. But there are other passages of Scripture which can hardly fail to occur to every one on reading that before us, and which are fitted to bring out more fully its meaning and force. We read, for example, of wings ascribed to other inanimate objects, obviously for the purpose of denoting swiftness of execution, as when the psalmist says, "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;" and elsewhere, when speaking of God, and of his majesty and glory, he says, "Who maketh the clouds his chariot; who walketh upon the wings of the wind." In like manner, the psalmist frequently describes the peace and sense of security which the people of God enjoy, by the same figure that is employed by Malachi, as when he says, "My soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast." "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. .... He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." "The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

The passage under consideration, then, though expressed in language which might seem to have been exclusively designed for the comfort and encouragement of God's people in the time of Malachi, contains a most comprehensive statement of the rich provision which has been made for the security and the consolation of believers of all times. It is as true of believers

now, as it was of believers at the time of which the prophet spoke, that they are under the wings of the Sun of righteousness. And this implies a state of safety. So the Old Testament saints understood it, as is abundantly evident from the passages already quoted. And it was not safety from temporal calamities alone that they reckoned on. They knew that to dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and to abide under the shadow of the Almighty, was to be placed beyond the reach of spiritual calamities,—to enjoy the favour of God, which is life, and his loving-kindness, which is better than life,—to be able to say, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." And if Christ was thus a refuge and an hiding-place even to the Old Testament saints, though they knew his mediatorial work only in type and promise, how strong and how lively should be the feeling of safety which believers now experience, knowing, as they do, all that Christ did and endured, that he might work out a righteousness for their acceptance in the sight of God! If they have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them, and are careful to abide in Christ, holding fast the beginning of their confidence, how full of meaning to them should be the portions of the Old Testament Scriptures to which I have just referred, as descriptive of the state of safety into which they have been brought under the wings of the Sun of righteousness! But are believers as careful as they ought to be to realise, in their actual experience, a full sense of their deliverance from the wrath to come, and of their security against their spiritual enemies that still seek their ruin? Are they not in danger of resting satisfied with even a faint hope that they have reached the refuge of safety, instead of "giving all diligence to making their calling and election sure?" And is not even their faint hope too often rendered still fainter by the prevalence of sinful and worldly affections, which, if indulged, will assuredly involve them in darkness and doubt? And if, through spiritual indolence and sloth, they have been frequently brought into or kept long in such a state of uncertainty and disquietude, how should they feel rebuked by the care which is taken in Scripture to assure them, that if they will but flee to Christ, and cleave to him, by a simple faith, he will be to them "as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tem-

pest,"—yea, "as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land?"

And what is thus so fully and so frequently stated elsewhere in Scripture is here again repeated under a different figure; for it is not safety alone that is promised to believers under the wings of the Sun of righteousness. Healing is also provided for them there: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." And this word "healing" is very comprehensive and precious. The figure by which the spiritually ruined and miserable condition of men is most frequently and emphatically represented in Scripture is that of disease. This one word comprehends all the degradation, the loss of communion with God, the incapacity of enjoying that communion, and the misery inseparable from a state of alienation from him, which sin has entailed upon the soul. And if so, then healing is equally comprehensive in meaning, implying every thing that is needful for the remedy or the removal of man's spiritual disease. The Scriptures are full of statements to this effect. When the prophet would set forth in the most appalling form the degeneracy and ungodliness of Israel, he employs such language as this, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." In similar language, another prophet laments the hopeless debasement and impenitency of Judah: "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" And what were all the miracles of healing which our Lord wrought during his personal ministry, but so many intimations of the spiritual healing which he had come to dispense. These miracles occupied a very prominent and a very large place in the Saviour's work upon earth; and we cannot suppose that nothing more was meant by them than merely to manifest his divine beneficence, in adding a few years of health and comfort to the life of those who sought to him for relief. Viewed in connection with the Old Testament predictions concerning himself, they plainly intimated that he was the great spiritual Physician, and that all might come and be healed.

And so he is here represented. He is set forth not only as a refuge to his people, covering them from the wrath to which they were exposed, but delivering them from the misery inseparable from a sinful nature. They are guilty, and, therefore, they need to be pardoned and restored to the favour of God. But they are unholy, spiritually defiled, and need, therefore, to be fitted for enjoying fellowship with God. The psalmist understood this; for we find him saying, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." And so do all true believers. They know that forgiveness alone is not salvation. It is but the beginning of that gracious interposition whereby they are to be saved, the removal of the obstacle that would prevent the flowing forth upon them of that quickening, life-giving, and purifying influence, whereby alone they can be brought into that state of spiritual health in which salvation mainly consists. And this is the healing that is chiefly promised in the passage before us, even the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby believers are "transformed by the renewing of their mind," "created in Christ Jesus unto good works," and finally conformed in all things to the image of the Son of God.

But there is included in the promise another healing, which is also frequently spoken of in Scripture, and to which there must be, I think, a reference in this passage, from the circumstances in which it was delivered;—I mean the healing of consolation or comfort under the trials to which believers are exposed. The psalmist says, "The Lord healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." And, in like manner, we find the prophet saying, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." There is thus abundant provision made for the safety, the spiritual health, and the consolation of all upon whom the Sun of righteousness has arisen with healing under his wings. But let believers remember that this promise of consolation, this healing of the wounded spirit, necessarily implies that they may lay their account with being afflicted or wounded. If it were otherwise, the promise would have no meaning. And it is worthy of remark, that not a few of the richest and most precious promises of the Gospel are expressed in

language which implies that the people of God are, as a matter of course, in a state of trial, where they need comfort and encouragement. And can any thing more emphatically intimate that such a state of trial is necessary, as the discipline which is to train believers to a meetness for glory, by making discoveries to them of the love, and faithfulness, and power of the Redeemer which they would not have made if they had been spared their trials? No doubt, it were as easy to Him to exempt them from suffering, as to sustain and comfort them under it. But how much might they not lose by such exemption! for if the Church of old had never passed through a dark night of sorrow and suffering, how little comparatively would they have known of the preciousness of the promise, "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

LXXIII.

GOD'S LAW TO BE REMEMBERED.

MALACHI IV. 4–6.

THESE last words of Malachi, and the last of Old Testament prophecy, were evidently addressed to the Jews as a people, and as the visible Church of God,—that is, to believers and unbelievers alike. In the immediately preceding context, the prophet had set forth by very significant symbols, and in very emphatic language, the coming of Christ, and the consequences of that coming, as it was to affect the godly and the ungodly respectively. To the one class,—the ungodly,—it was to be a day that was to burn as an oven, in which they, as stubble, were to be consumed, so that there was to be left to them neither root nor branch. To the other class,—the godly and believing,—it was to be a day in which "the Sun of righteousness" was to arise with healing under his wings; and when, after a long and dreary winter of privation and persecution, they were to go forth into the full enjoyment of light and liberty; walking, as it were, on the ashes of their persecutors, who had been burnt up in the fierce anger of the Lord; and growing up as calves of the stall, or fatted calves,—not, indeed, in possession of worldly wealth and luxury, but enjoying, in rich abundance, all that was needful for their spiritual nourishment, and their growth in holiness and happiness: "And ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this,

saith the Lord of hosts." It may be that this solemn prediction will not be fully accomplished till that great and terrible day, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." But there was a day, great and terrible also, when, in the destruction of Jerusalem, and in the preservation of Christ's people amidst the calamities of that season of wrath and retribution, the prediction, if not exhausted, was, to a great extent, and very clearly, fulfilled. Such, then, was the message which the prophet delivered to the believing and unbelieving respectively; and, having delivered that message, we might suppose that his work was done. But he had still a farewell, a parting word for all,—a word of warning and of comfort,—expressive alike of the justice and of the long-suffering patience of God,—a renewed assurance of the absolute certainty of his threatened judgments, and the unchangeable faithfulness of his gracious promises. In this parting word it was plainly intimated that the voice of prophecy was not to be heard again, till it could announce the immediate approach of Him who was the chief subject of all prophecy,—even the long promised and expected Messiah,—but that it would assuredly be heard then. How early or how late this event should be, was not revealed. But that it should be, was a most precious promise to God's people, and a solemn warning to his enemies, fitted to awaken a lively expectation in the minds of all. The very uncertainty as to the time at which the predicted event was to take place, was fitted to keep alive and strengthen that expectation. And it was thus provided for, that the voice of Malachi should, as it were, continue to vibrate in the ears of God's professing people, till it broke forth in a clearer and more certain sound in "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high-way for our God."

I have said that the last words of Malachi were words of warning. And such plainly is the character of the 4th verse, "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments." In thus reverting to the law as delivered by Moses, the

prophet virtually said to his countrymen of that time, and to men of all times, that, in all that he addressed to them, he had required and threatened nothing but what had been required and threatened from the beginning. The rebuke which he administered to the hypocrite, the formalist, and the false professor of every shade of character, was often very severe; and the judgment with which he threatened them was, indeed, most appalling. But he reminds them, in conclusion, that, in all his reproofs and denunciations, he was only giving forth the law of God as originally given forth to their fathers through Moses,—a law which, like the Lawgiver himself, is unchangeably holy, just, and right,—a law from which one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass till all be fulfilled. And even the ungodly among the Jews could hardly fail to feel the truth and the force of the prophet's appeal to Moses. They were familiar, at least, with the letter of the law; and on hearing such an appeal to it as the prophet made, in immediate connection with the terrible judgment which he had foretold, they could hardly avoid being reminded of those portions of the writings of Moses which are contained in the 26th chapter of Leviticus, and the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, and in which judgments against Israel, in the event of their forsaking the law, and their refusing to walk in the statutes and ordinances of the Lord, are denounced in terms the most emphatic which human language can express, and by figures the most appalling that the history of human suffering can furnish. What the effect was of their being thus reminded of the law and of its solemn sanctions, we are not told. There is reason to fear, from what the prophet has said of their arrogance, and pride, and self-righteousness, that they would only be the more irritated and offended. But, whatever use they might make of the communication thus vouchsafed to them, it was an act of great condescension and mercy on the part of God to make it. It was a gracious intimation that the door of mercy was still open to them. It was a repetition of the invitation proclaimed by a former prophet, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." And with this gracious invitation and promise, it was also a solemn warning, that if they did not so return, the law would

take its course against them, and that the judgments denounced by Moses would assuredly overtake them in all their terrible severity. It was, in fact, as has been well observed, an announcement of the great truth, that if the divine law is not sanctified in men, it must be sanctified upon them,—that is to say, if it is not honoured by their obedience and their conformity to it, it must, and it will, be vindicated by their subjection to its penalty.

This is an eternal and unchangeable principle in the moral government of God; and it was to render the pardon of sinners consistent with this principle, that Christ undertook to die for them. They had contracted guilt, and, therefore, incurred punishment; and this punishment the law could neither remit nor mitigate. It must be inflicted, and Christ undertook to bear the infliction in their room; thereby not only satisfying the demands of the law, and vindicating its violated authority, but, in virtue of the glory of his nature, and the divine excellence of his character, magnifying the law, and making it honourable, as the punishment of guilty men themselves never could have done. But this is not all; for even this would not have been sufficient. Though believers in Christ have satisfied the law, even to the uttermost of its demands, in so far as it required the infliction of the punishment due to their guilt, still it must be honoured in them by their obedience,—their being brought into a state of holy conformity to it; and, to render their complete salvation consistent with this principle, the Holy Spirit undertook the gracious work of their sanctification,—that work wherein he "renews them in the Spirit of their mind," "creates them again in Christ Jesus unto good works," "cleanses them from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," till they "perfect holiness in the fear of God," and so "be conformed to the image of his Son." These precious truths were not revealed clearly, and in all their fulness, to the Church in Malachi's time, as they are now revealed to us through the holy apostles, as well as the prophets. But the substance of them was known to the Old Testament Church: for, besides the law, properly so called,—that law which is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments, and still more briefly in the two, first, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind;" and second, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as

thyself;"—besides this law, they had statutes, and ordinances, whereby the doctrine of atonement was taught, and in which the one great atonement by the blood of Christ was set forth to their faith and hope. The law could only do then what it does still, namely, convict them of guilt, and pass upon them sentence of condemnation,—"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But they were permitted to offer sacrifices. The acceptance of these sacrifices was an intimation of forgiveness,—an assurance that the law, under the condemning sentence of which they lay, might be satisfied by the death of a substitute in their room, so as to remit the penalty to them. And as often as the truly humble, contrite, and believing worshipper presented his sacrifice, he was just acting faith in Christ: and when he returned from the house of the Lord to his own house, joyful and glad of heart, because his sacrifice had been accepted, his purpose and his desire would be to yield a new and a better obedience, not for the purpose of procuring pardon, but from gratitude for the pardon already received, through the blood of atonement.

The ground, then, of the believer's hope, and the great moving principle of the believer's obedience, under the Old Testament economy, were in substance the same as under the New Testament dispensation. We should be able, then, to form something like a right estimate of the guilt of the Jews in the time of Malachi, as the prophet has described it. They were chargeable, of course, with the violation of the law, which required them to love God with all their heart, and to love their neighbour as themselves. This guilt every man incurs every day, though not, perhaps, with all the aggravation of that of the Jews; for their sinning appears to have been presumptuous or high-handed. But this was not the only guilt with which they were chargeable. They polluted God's altar. They brought for an offering out of their flock "that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick," in daring disobedience to a most express and solemn commandment; thus sacrificing unto the Lord a polluted thing. And in doing so, they despised or made light of the atonement. They virtually said that they needed it not, but that it was a service done to God, for which they were entitled to his favour and protection. And what is this but the sin of mere nominal Chris-

tians?—of those who have neither felt a deep sense of their guilt, nor seen the preciousness of the Saviour, nor experienced the pacifying efficacy of his blood; but who, in professing to believe the Gospel, and decently observing its ordinances, flatter themselves that they possess the character, and will participate in the privileges of Christians? The sin of the Jews may appear more gross and palpable, because, in bringing for an offering out of their flock that which was torn, or lame, or sick, instead of a male without blemish, they visibly set at defiance an express commandment; but let us not forget that now, in the full effulgence of Gospel light, the service of the mere formalist, who, instead of presenting an offering of unfeigned penitence, gratitude, and love, in the exercise of true faith in Christ, is satisfied with the cold observance of mere outward ordinances, may be more offensive in the sight of God than even the polluted offerings of his ancient people. The admonition, then, "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, ... with the statutes and judgments," is as needful, I fear, for multitudes now, as it was for the Jews of Malachi's time. The prophet did not send them to the law alone, as if, by their obedience to it, they could work out a righteousness for themselves. He reminded them of it, that they might be convicted of guilt; and he reminded them also of the ordinances in which an atonement for guilt was set forth, so that they might be "shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed." And how many are there who still need thus to be dealt with,—to be sent to the law that they may be convicted of guilt, and then directed to Him whose blood alone can wash their guilt away! for how many are there who have never been truly convinced that they are lost, and to whom the law has not been their schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ!

It appears, then, that this admonition is one which is but too much needed, and, therefore, but too seasonable at all times. It was, however, peculiarly so in the time of Malachi. It was plainly intimated to the Jews, that the voice of prophecy was for a time to cease;—an intimation which might itself have awakened some alarm in the minds of not a few of them, inasmuch as they had but too much reason to regard it as intended to remind them how they had treated the prophets who had been successively sent to them, and to warn them that God was

about to cease any longer to strive with them. Well might such reflections on the past, and such forebodings of the future, have been awakened in the minds of the Jews, by the intimation that prophecy was for a time to cease; and it is probable, I think, that the intimation was designed to have this effect. If it was, however, the prophet does not dwell upon it. Nor was it necessary. It was enough to remind them that, though prophets were no longer sent to testify against their iniquities, and to warn them of coming judgments, there was a permanent witness among them, even the eternal and unalterable law of God, whose authority they professed, at least, to acknowledge, and by which they should be judged. And, while the carnal and worldly-minded were thus admonished, that, independently of all that the prophets had witnessed against them, there was a standing testimony for God in the midst of them, whereby the severest of his judgments, which might overtake them, would be justified, —the humble and believing were reminded, that, even in the absence of prophets, they were not without the means of knowing God's will, and of retaining a sense of his forgiveness and favour. We have not been told, as I have already remarked, what the effect of Malachi's last admonition was on the Jews of his own time. But we are very plainly told, at least by implication, that, when the time arrived which the prophet here predicted, his admonition had come to be all but universally disregarded,—that the Jews, generally, had ceased to remember the law of Moses, the Lord's servant, with his statutes and judgments, and that they were well-nigh ripe for the infliction of the last and most desolating of God's judgments. All this is obviously implied in the promise with which the prophet closes his message: "Behold," says he, speaking in the name of Jehovah, "behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

I do not, at present, inquire who was meant by "Elijah," or in what way he accomplished the work here ascribed to him. I would direct attention to the solemn statement of what the consequences would have been if he had not been sent, or if he had failed to effect the object of his mission. He was to be sent

"before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord;" and though nothing more had been said of him, this would have been sufficiently alarming, inasmuch as it implied that the judgment threatened in such appalling language at the beginning of this chapter, would assuredly overtake the Jews; and this, again, did necessarily imply a growing degeneracy on their part, notwithstanding all the means employed for turning them to repentance,—even in spite of the labours of Elijah himself. But how much darker does the representation of their guilt appear, when we take into view what is said in the last verse, where it is declared that Elijah's work was that which was to prevent the immediate execution of the divine judgment, even to the uttermost. The work of Elijah is represented as consisting in "turning the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers;" and this was to be done, says the prophet, speaking in the name of the Lord, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." It has been well observed, that "every thing terrible, which can be conceived, is contained in this one word, Curse." And so the Jews must have understood it; for it was that with which Jericho of old, and other cities of Canaan, were smitten and devoted to the Lord, in vindication of his supremacy, as the only living and true God. Such, then, was the judgment which was ready to overtake the Jews, and the immediate execution of which was delayed only in consequence of the change which God wrought upon the people by the instrumentality of Elijah. What, then, must have been the aggravated guilt, the moral and spiritual debasement, which well-nigh subjected the Jews to the terrible judgment of being smitten with a curse? No language could express, in a general way, the extent of their guilt more emphatically than the passage before us does. In what, then, did their sin consist? Had they ceased to acknowledge, or come openly to disown, the supremacy of the Lord God of Israel, as the only living and true God? Had they again fallen away, as their fathers too often did, to the worship of the false gods of the heathen? Had they polluted the house of God with the abominations of heathen worship, filled Jerusalem with their idols, and made their children pass through the fire to Moloch, sacrificing their sons and their daughters unto devils? All this their fathers had done; and because they did so, wrath

had come upon them; for the anger of the Lord was "kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them." Had their children, then, the Jews who lived at the time here foretold by the prophet, namely, the time at which Christ was to appear,—had they fallen into the gross and enormous transgressions with which their fathers had been chargeable; and was it on account of such transgressions that they were on the point of being smitten with a curse, when Elijah came, and was the honoured instrument of averting, or at least delaying it? No; the Jews of the time referred to were chargeable with none of the flagrant rebellions or abominable idolatries of which I have been speaking. Of this we have ample means of judging; for in the Gospel histories their character has been fully, and, of course, most faithfully drawn. From these histories it appears, that there was among them a very large amount of what is commonly called a religious profession. It appears, too, that the true God was avowedly the one only object of their worship, and that, on the ground of being his people, they thought themselves entitled to be, and confidently expected that they would be, the head of the heathen, exalted to supremacy over all the nations of the earth. In fact, they abhorred idolatry, and held idolaters in contempt. Not only, therefore, had they a profession of religion, but they were zealous in support of that profession,—yea, and apparently austere, rigorous, and self-denied in the practice of it.

They had, indeed, among them a scoffing sect,—as we have in our time, and as all times have had,—namely, the Sadducees, who derided all that was essential to religion, in so far as man is concerned; for they held that "there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit." But they were not the popular sect. Their sentiments were not generally diffused among the people. The class that really possessed influence, and which gave the impress of its character to the great body of the Jews, was the sect of the Pharisees. And who ever manifested a more ardent zeal than they did for the authority of the divine commandments, even to the most minute points, both of doctrine and of practice? And, judging from appearance, of whom could it ever be said, if not of them, that they remembered the law of Moses, which the

Lord commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments? So zealous were they for the authority and integrity of that law, that they repeatedly charged the Saviour himself with transgressing it; and the whole tenor of the Gospel history shows that the Pharisees stood high in general estimation; and that, however immoral, and even profligate, many of the people might be, yet they looked up with reverence to the Pharisees as their spiritual guides, whose teaching they were to receive with unhesitating acquiescence. And what, then, was the guilt with which the prophet, by anticipation, charged them, as bringing them to the very verge of the desolating curse? We might not have been able to answer this question, had it not been that He who sits "as a refiner and purifier of silver," appeared personally among them, and, by his presence, subjected them to such a sifting and trying, as brought fully into view their real character. And their sin, as testified by Him who is the faithful and the true witness, was that of formality, and self-righteousness, and hypocrisy, and that with not a little of an outward religious profession. So great and so heinous was their guilt, that had not Elijah been sent, and his labour been blessed for effecting at least a partial reformation, the Lord had come, and smitten the land with a curse.

And what a solemn lesson does this view of the character of the Jews teach, both to communities and individuals! How alarming the thought, that, under a religious profession,—and even great apparent zeal in that profession,—there may lie concealed guilt so aggravated as to draw down the righteous judgment of God! And how should it shut us up to searching self-examination, to reflect that the tendency of a mere outward profession is to harden the heart, and strengthen its natural enmity against God, and against his truth! So it was with the scribes and Pharisees, and with the blinded multitude whom they misled to their ruin. They did not, like the Sadducees, reject the truth altogether, and sink down into a cold and inactive infidelity. They could not, perhaps, rid themselves of the conviction that the divine law was binding upon them, and that by this law they were to be judged. But they sought to satisfy its demands by a compliance with the mere letter of its requirements; and they found that, by this compliance, they

not only pacified their conscience, but gratified their pride and self-righteousness. This gratification, of course, grew with the growing rigour of their observances; and, so enamoured did they become of a system which ministered so largely to the natural feelings of the unrenewed heart, that they multiplied what they called religious observances far beyond what the law required,—adding to the divine ordinances ceremonies of man's invention, till they made the word of God of none effect by their traditions. On the same principle, their zeal for making proselytes to all that was peculiar in their system, was ardent and unwearied; because, in every case in which they succeeded, they felt all the pride of a victory,—all the gratification which could flow from the thought that they had established another claim to the divine favour and approbation. Accordingly, they compassed sea and land to make one proselyte, making him twofold more the child of hell than themselves. Meanwhile, their hatred of the pure and holy truth of God was gathering strength; and, when that truth was uttered in their hearing by the lips of the Saviour, and was practically exhibited before them in his character, their enmity was so roused and called forth, that it could not be satisfied till they had succeeded in crucifying and slaying the Lord of glory. In all this they might be, and no doubt were, influenced by worldly motives also; inasmuch as their worldly possessions, power, and reputation, were endangered by the promulgation of the truth. But, independently of such motives, the tendency of a system which so gratified their pride and self-righteousness, was to harden their heart against all that was truly spiritual and holy, and to lead them on to that atrocious deed whereby they filled up the measure of their iniquity.

And has not this truth been illustrated, and in a marvellously similar manner, in the great apostasy in the Christian Church,—the Papacy? The resemblance between this system and that of the Pharisees, is truly striking. In so far as any thing that can be called religion is concerned, Popery, like Pharisaism, addresses itself to the pride and self-righteousness of men. It acknowledges Christ much in the same way as the Pharisees of old acknowledged Jehovah, the God of Israel,—that is, to dishonour him. It substitutes, for the Saviour's

finished work, the penances, and pilgrimages, and bodily mortifications of sinners themselves, or the merits of other sinners, who have something to spare after securing their own salvation. It adds to, or rather substitutes for the word of God, the traditions of the Church, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. It compasses sea and land, also, to make one proselyte; and, for the accomplishment of its purpose, will not hesitate to violate honour, and honesty, and truth, and all those moral considerations which form the bond of human society, and which even infidel men generally respect and hold sacred. And, as if it would not be outdone in any thing by Pharisaism of old, though it shed the blood of the Saviour, how deeply and indelibly stained has Popery been with the blood of the saints,—of those who reflected the image of the Saviour, and who became the objects of popish hatred and malignity just because they reflected that image!

How alarming to think what hideous forms of wickedness may lurk under the fair surface of a professedly Christian community,—wickedness which, if it were possible, or if occasion could offer, would rival the darkest deed of iniquity that ever was perpetrated! And how should we labour and pray, that the word of God may have free course and be glorified, and that the truth as it is in Jesus may be everywhere proclaimed, and everywhere received in faith and love! How should this subject, too, awaken the jealousy of individuals regarding themselves, and set them upon serious self-examination as to their own spiritual character and condition! Pride and self-righteousness are inherent in every human heart; and we have seen the tendency of a mere outward profession, in which value is attached to external ordinances alone, to foster these principles, and to harden the heart against the reception of the simple truth, which alone is saving. There may, indeed, be some, perhaps many, who are not conscious of finding, in the outward religious exercises which they are accustomed to observe, any thing to gratify a self-righteous spirit, or any thing to afford them much sensible satisfaction of any kind. But what is this but just to say, that they have never been disturbed at all in their spiritual deadness and indifference? And surely it is high time that such should awake and bethink them, and inquire whither they are

going, and what their end is to be. But with regard to those who may have had their fears and misgivings, and have sought a refuge from these in a more strict and rigorous observance of what they call religious duties, and have begun to experience some degree of peace and rest in these observances, I would warn them that they are in great peril. Every time that they seek and find relief in such a way, their self-righteousness will gather strength. They will become, by degrees, impatient of the simple truth as it is in Jesus. They will, in time, feel offended with the statement of the great truth, that they are utterly lost, and that by grace they must be saved, through faith; and that not of themselves, it being the gift of God. Their pride will come to be awakened when they are pressed with the humbling doctrines of the Gospel,—the very doctrines which it most nearly concerns them to understand, and believe, and ponder. And they will be more disinclined every day to come and cast themselves unreservedly upon Him who can alone give rest to the weary and heavy laden.

LXXIV.

THE COMING OF ELIJAH FORETOLD.

MALACHI IV. 5, 6.

THE prophet here promised, under the name of Elijah, is obviously the same person whose mission had been foretold in the first verse of the preceding chapter: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." And this prediction is as obviously a renewal of the promise long before given by the prophet Isaiah, as recorded in the 40th chapter of his prophecies: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God." That the passage before us, and the two others quoted, refer to the same person, is plain, I think, from the office assigned to him in each,—namely, that of the messenger or forerunner to announce and to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord, the Messenger or Angel of the covenant, the long-promised Messiah. But if there were any doubt on the subject, we need only refer, for the removal of it, to the New Testament, where we find all the three passages quoted, not only as containing, in substance, the same prediction, but as being in a special manner fulfilled in the same person,—namely, John the Baptist. These quotations or allusions are numerous, and are introduced on a great variety of occasions. I do not, therefore, stop to collect them, because their full import

and force would not be perceived, without dwelling at some length on the particular circumstances which led to their being introduced. And this I may have occasion to do in the course of my illustration of the passage under consideration. But there is one of these passages, the earliest in point of time in which John the Baptist is spoken of in the New Testament, to which I would specially refer at the outset, not only as sufficient of itself to confirm the remarks now offered, but as furnishing a very beautiful commentary on the words before us. I refer to the divine communication which was made to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, while executing the priest's office in the temple in the order of his course, as recorded in the 1st chapter of Luke's Gospel. It was his lot, we are told, to burn incense in the temple of the Lord; and while so engaged, "there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense;"—and "the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias," or Elijah, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

It will be observed, that these are almost the very words employed by the prophet in foretelling the coming of Elijah; while the slight difference between that prediction and the angel's announcement serves not only to explain why John was called Elijah, but also to throw much light on the nature of the Baptist's work as described by the prophet. It is well known that the Jews understood Malachi's prophecy to mean that Elijah, the identical Elijah who prophesied in the days of Ahab the wicked king of Israel, was personally to appear before the coming of Messiah. I need hardly remark, that the angel's announcement to Zacharias plainly refutes this vain fancy. But it does more. It explains the ground on which the prophet was directed

to foretell John under the name of Elijah: "He shall go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elias." It will be recollected—for I assume that everybody is familiar with the history of Elijah—that he stood pre-eminent among the prophets of Old Testament times. As has been well observed, "he was the head of the prophetic order in the kingdom of Israel,—nay, in a certain sense, the only prophet of that generation, seeing that his successors possessed the spirit of prophecy, only, as it were, by or through him, just as it was said that there was given of the spirit that was upon Moses to the seventy elders." This was strikingly illustrated in the manner in which Elisha received the spirit of prophecy. When Elijah, immediately before being taken up into heaven, said unto him, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee," Elisha said, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." Elisha was too intent on the object of his request, to allow his attention to be diverted, so as to be taken by surprise by the solemn event which he had been taught to expect. He did see when Elijah was parted from him, and "went up by a whirlwind into heaven:" and "he took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him," which soon proved to be a visible pledge or token that his petition had been granted; for when, with that mantle, he "smote the waters" of Jordan, "and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" "they parted hither and thither; and Elisha went over." Accordingly, "when the sons of the prophets, which were to view at Jericho, saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." And this pre-eminence of Elijah among the prophets of the Old Testament is still further illustrated by the fact, that divine commissions were given to him, which he did not personally execute, but the execution of which he delegated to others that were to come after him. Thus, when about to return from Horeb, the mount of God, whither he had fled from the wrath and the vengeance of Jezebel, he received two commandments, first, to go and anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and, second, to anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel. But neither of these acts were done by him personally. The first was performed by Elisha; the second by one of

the sons of the prophets, in obedience to Elisha's command. Elijah did thus stand as the head or representative of the prophetic order,—the individual in whom was manifested, in a peculiar manner and degree, the spirit of prophecy. And if so, then, if the voice of prophecy, after being for a time silent, was again to be heard, it might well be called the voice of Elijah; and the individual in whose person it was to revive, independently of any peculiar resemblance to the prophet of old, might most appropriately bear Elijah's name. And such was to be the state of things at the period foretold by Malachi. Prophecy was, for a time, to cease, but was to be renewed for the purpose of announcing the immediate advent of Messiah. This the prophet foretells in the verses before us; and the more emphatically to declare that the spirit of prophecy, which was then to revisit the Church, was to be identical with that which had formerly been vouchsafed, he represents it as the re-appearance of Elijah. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."

But though the revival of prophecy, after being, for a time, silent, might have been appropriately foretold in these words, whatever were the circumstances, or whoever was the person in whom it was to be restored, the language will appear peculiarly significant and expressive, when we take into account the time and manner in which the prediction was fulfilled. The condition and character of the Jews, at the period of the Baptist's appearing, were such, that the very name of Elijah, or any thing that could remind them of him, was fitted to call up many recollections of the past, and to suggest very solemn anticipations of the future. With the history and character of Elijah, they must have been familiar. Indeed, there are incidental notices enough in the Gospel histories to show that they were so, and even that the expectation of his re-appearing was generally entertained. They must have recollected, then, from what had been recorded of Elijah in their Scriptures, that he was called to the prophetic office at a time of great corruption and degeneracy, when the kingdom of Israel, the ten tribes, had almost universally apostatised from the true faith, and, under the influence of the wicked Ahab, and the still more wicked Jezebel, his wife, had given themselves up to all the abominations of idolatry, in its worst and

most revolting forms; nay, had become so brutish and degraded, that they stood a whole day witnessing the insane and frantic gestures of the priests of Baal calling upon their god to hear them, and to show himself to be the true God. The Jews, both in Malachi's time and in that of the Baptist, must have known that Elijah, in respect both of his personal character and of his commission, was a prophet specially gifted and instructed for discharging the duties of his office among a people in the lowest state of moral and spiritual debasement,—that he was a man peculiarly severe in his personal appearance, and manners and deportment,—that he was the stern reprover of everything ungodly and unjust,—that, at his rebuke, the mightiest and the proudest quailed, Jezebel alone, I believe, excepted,—and that everything in his person and his conduct plainly intimated, that it must have been a very wicked and ungodly generation to which such a prophet was sent. They must have known, moreover, that the commission which he received and executed was in perfect accordance with what his personal appearance suggested,—that his own work, and that of his successor Elisha, was, from first to last, one continued effort to turn Israel from their idols to the service of the living God,—that the very first notice given of him in the sacred history is his coming into the presence of Ahab the king, and addressing him in these alarming words: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew or rain these years, but according to my word,"—and that this judgment, which continued for three years, bringing with it, of course, a desolating famine, was but a token of still more terrible judgments which he denounced upon the king, and consequently upon the people, who uniformly followed the king for evil. And, finally, the Jews must have been aware that the history of Israel, from the time of Elijah downward, fully justified all the sternness and severity which the prophet had manifested, and verified all the predictions which he uttered,—that Israel, or the ten tribes, continued impenitent, and, with some slight interruptions, became more and more degenerate,—and that, after being visited, in the righteous judgment of God, with various disasters, they were carried into captivity, and the heathen were sent to dwell in their cities, and to take possession of their land.

All this must have been known to the Jews of the Baptist's time; and the very mention of the name of Elijah could hardly fail to bring it all to their remembrance. And if so, then what ought this prediction to have suggested to them as often as they read or heard it? If Elijah was again to be sent to them,—and they themselves believed that he was to appear in person,—did not this imply that their character, as a people, must resemble that of Israel of old, to whom Elijah was originally sent? For to what other than a backsliding and degenerate people could such a prophet as Elijah be expected to appear? And we cannot doubt that the humble and believing portion of the Jews would so interpret the prophecy, and that they would be waiting the fulfilment of it with mingled emotions of hope and fear. But the people at large, and especially the rulers, those who possessed influence and power, had evidently no such fears or misgivings. They had no doubt that they were in the full possession of the divine favour. They were not, as their fathers, in the time of Elijah, were, idolaters. They were the people of the Lord, the worshippers of the true God. They could not conceive, therefore, that the day of the Lord, which Malachi foretold, was one which they had any reason to anticipate with fear and trembling. It might be, and perhaps they believed that it certainly would be, both great and dreadful. But as they understood it, it was to be a day of great deliverance to them, and a day of dreadful retribution to the heathen, by whom they felt themselves oppressed. This was evidently the miserable refuge of lies and self-righteousness in which they were reposing. And if they were to be awakened from their delusion, what was better fitted to do so than the revival among them of the spirit and the power of Elijah, in the person of John, addressing even the Pharisees and Sadducees, in language as stern as ever the prophet of old had employed, showing them that he did not more closely resemble Elijah, than they resembled Israel to whom Elijah had been sent, and telling them that it was of them the prophet spoke, when he foretold "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord?"

It appears from what is recorded of the Baptist's preaching, that it was accompanied by a power which awed even the proud and the ungodly, furnishing, of itself, evidence enough that he bore a divine commission, and, therefore, that he was the person

whom he announced himself to be, even the prophet foretold by Isaiah as the forerunner or messenger of the Lord, and consequently the Elijah here promised. But if we would clearly perceive the grace and kindness of the Lord towards his own people in this matter, as well as his compassion and forbearance towards the impenitent, we must look to the care that was taken to give them an accumulation of evidence to assure them that John was the person who was to announce the coming of the Lord. That evidence, too, was, with divine condescension, adapted to the gross and carnal conceptions of that generation of the Jews, who had come to be almost exclusively influenced by objects of sense. For example, it was plainly intimated to them, even in John's external appearance and manner of life, that he was the person foretold by the prophet. It is said of him in the 3d chapter of Matthew, "The same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey." In the 1st chapter of 2d Kings, we find recorded a description of Elijah, introduced, as it were, incidentally, in the very words in which the evangelist has described John in the passage just quoted. We are there told that Ahaziah, the king of Israel, the son and successor of Ahab, "was sick; and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease." The prophet Elijah, by the express command of God, went and met the messengers, and said unto them, "Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." With this solemn communication the messengers returned, and delivered it to their master. On hearing it, the king asked them, saying, "What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words? And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite." When the Jews, then, beheld the Baptist, as described by the evangelist, and, at the same time, heard him rebuke the sins of all who waited on his ministry, without distinction of rank or condition, in language the most severe and uncompromising, and with a power which none ventured to gainsay or

resist, it was hardly possible for them to avoid being reminded of Elijah, as described in the Scriptures, and of the promise, moreover, of his re-appearing, as recorded in the passage before us. And believing, as many of them at least did, that John was a prophet, we cannot easily conceive how they could fail to conclude that his striking resemblance to Elijah was intended as one of the signs or tokens whereby they might recognise him as the messenger or forerunner of Messiah, promised under the name of Elijah. And there is reason, I think, to believe that some of the more humble and devout among them did come to this conclusion, and were thereby awakened to a more earnest and anxious expectation of the events that were to follow. But while I cannot help believing that the striking resemblance, even in external appearance, between Elijah and the Baptist, was designed to arrest the attention of the Jews, and to help them to a right interpretation of this prophecy, and of other corresponding predictions of Scripture, I believe, also, with some commentators, that more than this was intended, by recording in the inspired volume, circumstances apparently so minute as the manner in which these prophets were clothed.

It will be recollected that, under the Old Testament dispensation, a great deal of the divine teaching which the Church received was symbolical,—that is, instruction was communicated by visible representations or symbols. Now, from a very early period, it was usual for persons who were in deep affliction, from whatever cause the affliction might arise, to wear sackcloth or cloth of hair, as the badge of sorrow and mourning. Thus we read of Jacob, that when the intelligence of Joseph's alleged death was brought to him, he "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days." In subsequent parts of Scripture, we read of the same practice so frequently, as plainly to show that it was universal; insomuch that the expression, "putting on sackcloth," was employed to denote being deeply afflicted or distressed, even when that garment was not actually worn; and that "putting off sackcloth" denoted, in the same figurative sense, being delivered from sorrow and sadness. Thus we find the prophet Amos threatening Israel of old in these words, "I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth

upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day." And the Psalmist thus describes the consolation and relief which he had experienced in the time of trouble, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness." In like manner, we find fasting frequently conjoined with wearing sackcloth, as denoting the same state of mind and feeling,—and very naturally, too; for when men are deeply afflicted in spirit, they are little disposed for the gratifications of sense. Such, then, was the universal practice in Israel, even from the earliest times,—as, indeed, it appears to have been with other nations also; and advantage was taken of this custom to give significancy and force to Elijah's ministry. He appeared before Israel in the garb of mourning, as one in deep sorrow and sadness; for he wore a garment of hair, and was girt about the loins with a leathern girdle. He appeared also with fasting; for during the famine which he himself foretold, he was dependent, for a season, on the supply of food brought to him by the ravens in the wilderness, and on the water in the brook towards which he had been directed; and when the brook was dried up, he was commanded to sojourn beyond the borders of Israel, and was contented, for many days, to share, with the poor widow of Zidon and her house, in the barrel of meal and cruise of oil which the Lord had blessed. By his appearance and his manner of life, he did thus most significantly intimate, and most impressively enforce, what was the great object of his mission, namely, to preach repentance,—to call upon the king and the people alike to humble themselves before God, and to turn from their abominable idolatries, if peradventure his righteous judgments might be averted. And such, also, was the purpose for which John was sent; for "he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," and warning all of every rank and degree to flee from the wrath to come. And he, too, symbolically enforced his doctrine, as Elijah had done, by his external appearance and his manner of life; and, accustomed as the Jews had always been to figurative or symbolical teaching, it ought to have been to them, not only an intelligible sign, but one very significant and full of meaning, that "John had his raiment of camel's

hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins," and that "his meat was locusts and wild honey."

Another help afforded to the Jews, to enable them to recognise in John the Elijah foretold by Malachi, is the character which John assumed when he came into the wilderness of Judea. He openly declared himself to be the person spoken of by the prophet Isaiah: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." This, it is true, was his own testimony, and, therefore, would be satisfactory to those only who believed that he had a divine commission. But multitudes of the Jews believed and acknowledged this,—nay, it may be doubted, I think, whether among those who saw and heard him, there were any who were not secretly convinced that he was a prophet, though they might not acknowledge it, or might even impiously assert, as some did, that he had a devil. If, then, they believed that John was a man sent from God, they could not hesitate to admit his own account of himself. They must have believed, therefore, that he was the person of whom the prophet Isaiah spake, saying, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." And if they were familiar with the writings of Malachi,—and they were as likely to be so as with any of the prophetical writings, he being the last,—they could hardly fail to see that the prediction in the 1st verse of the 3d chapter of Malachi, was a renewal of the prophecy of Isaiah, foretelling the same messenger or preparer of the way of the Lord. "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." And between this prediction and the passage under consideration the connection is too obvious to be overlooked; for nobody can doubt that the messenger of the Lord, foretold at the beginning of the 3d chapter, is the Elijah promised in the words before us. And this furnishes an explanation of the answer which the Baptist made to certain priests and Levites who had been sent to him from Jerusalem, as related in the 1st chapter of John's Gospel, when they came to ask him, "Who art thou?" The examination to which they subjected him showed, I think, that they had come with no friendly intention; for, as I read that examination, it was full of insolence. Among other questions which they put, they

asked him, "Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not." And the answer was alike true and dignified, befitting a prophet of the Lord to give to men who professed to hold the key of knowledge, wherewith to unlock the treasures of the Holy Scriptures, but who were perverting these Scriptures to the ruin of the people. His answer was true; for he was not Elijah, in the sense in which they used that word in their question; inasmuch as they meant the very same Elijah, the same identical prophet personally, who prophesied in the days of Ahab, king of Israel. Nor was there any thing evasive in John's answer. For how did he follow it up? He told them who he was, in the most explicit terms, even in the words of the Holy Ghost's inditing, as recorded in the very Scriptures which they professed to read and expound. In reply to the question, "What sayest thou of thyself?" he said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." He thus sent them to the Scriptures for an explanation of his character and his commission; and if they had known these Scriptures, as they professed to do, they would have seen that John was the Elijah who was to be sent to the Jews before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

But to return to the subject more immediately before us, I have remarked, that John's account of himself afforded the Jews who believed in his divine mission, additional ground for the conclusion that he was the prophet foretold by Malachi. And there was, in the very place where John appeared, a farther confirmation of that conclusion. He was foretold by Isaiah, as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness;" and all the evangelists have told us, more or less explicitly, that John began his public ministry "in the wilderness of Judea." Such a coincidence could hardly escape the Jews, or fail to strengthen the conviction produced by other considerations, that John was the prophet foretold by Isaiah. But there is much more, I think, in Isaiah's prediction, than merely that the person of whom he prophesied was to cry or raise his voice in the wilderness. I think that the prediction was not exhausted, or fully accomplished by the fact, that John came into the wilderness of Judea, preaching repentance. It was in the wilderness, also, or the desert, that the way of the Lord was to be prepared, and a highway made straight

for him. But this could not mean the natural desert, or wilderness. The preparation of the way of the Lord which John was commissioned to make, consisted in turning "the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers,"—making "ready a people prepared for the Lord." It was a moral and spiritual way, then, which John was sent to prepare; and it must have been a moral and spiritual desert in which he prepared it. The prediction of Isaiah thus foretold, not only the coming of John, but the state of spiritual destitution and debasement in which he was to find the people to whom he was sent. The wilderness, or uncultivated region of Judea, where he preached, was but a type of the spiritual barrenness which characterised the people. They were like a field which "beareth thorns and briars," and is therefore "rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." And such, accordingly, were almost the very words in which the Baptist himself described them. It is true, God had still a Church, or people, there. But they were, truly, a few sheep in the wilderness. They were without any shepherd to guide or to feed them. The truth, which should have been their spiritual food, had been perverted and corrupted, and was set forth to them only in connection with deadly error. The lips of the priests should have kept knowledge, and the law should have been sought at their mouth. But they had departed out of the way; they had caused many to stumble at the law; they had corrupted the covenant of Levi; yea, they had made the law of God of none effect, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Such was the state of the Jews when John appeared to preach the baptism of repentance, and to direct a perishing people to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world."

And such has often been the state of portions of the visible Church in New Testament times, in lands professedly Christian. So it was with our own land, while it lay under the dominion of the man of sin, desolated with the blighting and withering breath of Popery. It was then truly a spiritual wilderness; and there is but too much reason to fear that the great body of the people, like the Jews of old, were insensible to their spiritual destitution, and were contented to receive as God's truth, the deadly errors of that soul-destroying system. But if the conscience of any had

been awakened, how deplorable must their condition have been! For what had they to quiet their fears, and soothe the anguish of their spirit,—to answer, in fact, the all-important question, "What must I do to be saved?" To the Word of God, where that question is answered, they could not, or durst not go without the permission of the Church, and without also taking with them the Church's interpretation of what is written there. And for this they were dependent on the word of a priest,—a miserable sinner like themselves,—but whose word they were taught and trained to receive with unhesitating acquiescence, on pain of eternal damnation. And here it is, I think, that the monstrous doctrine of the infallibility of the Popish Church fully develops itself. Theoretically, it is still a question with Papists themselves where this infallibility is lodged,—whether in the Pope, or in a general council of the Church, or in the Pope and council together; and this question, neither Pope nor council has dared authoritatively to settle, because it is felt that it might produce a schism. But, practically, this infallibility is claimed by every individual priest, when occasion requires; for, in dealing with troubled consciences,—in answering the anxious questions, and resolving the tormenting doubts of awakened sinners, trembling at the prospect of eternity, he must know that if he succeeds in soothing the terrors of his miserable victims, it is because they believe that he is infallibly giving forth to them the decisions of the infallible Church, in regard to everything that they are required to believe or to do. From this state of worse than spiritual famine, our land, to a great extent, was long ago delivered. But have we become the "delightsome land" that we ought to be, "even as the garden of the Lord?" Let us remember that Popery is not the only "abomination that maketh desolate,"—that coldness, formality, and error may prevail, even where Popery is abhorred, and may so prevail as to convert the visible Church into a wilderness,—and that the prevalence of vital godliness alone can render her as a garden which the Lord hath watered. And let us remember for ourselves, personally, that it is only by the word of Christ dwelling in us richly, that we can largely experience peace and comfort, or abound in all those peaceable fruits of righteousness which through Jesus Christ are to the praise and glory of God the Father.

LXXV.

THE COMING OF ELIJAH FORETOLD.

MALACHI IV. 5, 6.

THE prediction contained in these verses was fulfilled, as we have already seen, in the person of John the Baptist, of whom it was said by the angel to Zacharias, "He shall go before him,"—that is, the Lord,—"in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." To the Church, this prediction was a very precious promise; for it gave her the assurance that, when the person thus foretold should appear, the coming of the Lord himself, the long promised Messenger of the covenant, was nigh at hand. But to the unbelieving and ungodly among the Jews,—and, alas! these were by far the majority,—the prediction was an awful threatening; for it solemnly warned them that the coming of the Lord would be to them a "great and dreadful day." The coming of John, then, and the revival of prophecy in him, after being for a time silent, was an event which both classes had reason to wait and watch for with the most profound interest. And when John did appear, various marks or tokens were graciously afforded, whereby both classes might have recognised in him the person foretold by Malachi. His outward personal appearance and manner of life could hardly fail to remind them of what they must often have heard of the great prophet whose name he bore; for the description of John's person, as given by the evangelists, is literally that

which has been recorded of Elijah. In the first chapter of the Second Book of Kings, Elijah is described as "an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins:" and the evangelists have taken care to tell us of John that he "had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins." It will be found, too,—as I formerly endeavoured to show,—that John's abstemious manner of life, as having for his meat locusts and wild honey, did also form such a resemblance to that of Elijah, as could hardly fail to occur to all who were familiar with the history of the great prophet of the Old Testament Scriptures; inasmuch as it is recorded of Elijah, that, on various occasions, and for a considerable period of time, he was dependent, for the supply of his daily food, on circumstances as much beyond the reach of his own power, as were those on which the Baptist depended. And another mark or token, whereby the Jews might have been led to inquire, at least, whether he was not the prophet foretold by Malachi, was the place in which he appeared when he entered on his ministry. He came, we are told, "preaching in the wilderness of Judea." The Jews, generally, could not be ignorant that the messenger, or forerunner of the Lord, had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah, as "The voice of one crying in the wilderness." They must have seen, also, that it was the same messenger, or forerunner, that was foretold again by Malachi, at the beginning of the 3d chapter of this book,—and the same, therefore, with the Elijah here promised.

When John, then, appeared preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and announced himself, moreover, as the person foretold by the prophet Isaiah, the Jews might have concluded that he was the person in whom the voice of prophecy, after being for a season silent, was again to be heard,—that he was the Elijah, whose appearing was to announce the immediate coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. These outward visible marks, which seemed to identify John with the prophet foretold by Malachi, were very plain, and level to the understanding of all; and from the care taken to record them, we may conclude, I think, that they were graciously designed to lead all, both the godly and the ungodly of the Jews, to recognise John as the predicted Elijah; for both classes did, with equal confidence, expect the coming of that prophet before Messiah appeared. But these

visible marks, namely, the Baptist's personal appearance, and the place where he entered on his ministry, were designed also, I think, to be solemn and significant symbols of great truths, which the more spiritually-minded among the Jews ought to have been able to interpret. While John appeared in the natural wilderness, he declared that he had come to prepare a way for the Lord in the desert. That could only mean a moral desert;—and, therefore, it did very plainly characterise the spiritually desolate condition of Judea, where the people, with the exception of a small remnant, had sunk into a state of formality, worldly-mindedness, and hypocrisy. And, in like manner, when John appeared, clothed in sackcloth, or cloth of hair, as Elijah did, being the raiment usually worn by those who were in deep affliction, and especially as a badge of humiliation and penitence, he did very plainly intimate that the attitude which it was most befitting and most necessary for them to assume before God, was that of self-abasement and contrite confession of sin. Accustomed as the Jews were to symbolical teaching, they might have inferred all this from the manner and the place in which John appeared among them. And if, in their blindness, they saw nothing of it, we could suppose that it must have been forced upon them by the Baptist's doctrine, when he said to all who waited on him, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

When Malachi foretold the coming of Elijah, or of a prophet in the spirit and power of Elijah, he also foretold that the chief subject or theme of that prophet's teaching would be the doctrine of repentance. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." This, it will be remembered, was the main subject of Malachi's own teaching. The whole four chapters of his book are chiefly occupied with remonstrances, reproofs, and warnings, with the view of awakening the Jews to repentance; for, subsequently to their return from Babylon, they had fallen into a carnal, self-righteous, and hypocritical state. And the judgment with which he threatened them, in the event of their remaining impenitent, was "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord,"—the day which they longed for,—

loudly complaining that its coming was so long delayed, in the presumptuous expectation that it would be to them a day of deliverance from all the oppressions of the heathen,—but which was to be a day that should burn as an oven, and all the proud, and all that did wickedly, should be stubble; and the day that was coming should burn them up, leaving them neither root nor branch. And the coming of that day he foretold as an infallible certainty, thereby virtually predicting that when the advent of Messiah drew near, the Jews would be found, as they were then, impenitent; and that but for a remnant, a seed which the Lord would leave them, they should be as Sodom, and should be made like unto Gomorrah. Malachi thus took leave of the Jews with telling them that, notwithstanding all his labour for their reformation, the great and terrible day of the Lord would certainly overtake them; but telling them also that, though the warning voice of prophecy was, for a season, to cease with him, it would be heard again before the coming of that day. And so, accordingly, it was in John the Baptist. I do not mean, merely, that John was a prophet, and that, like his predecessor, the last of the Old Testament prophets, he preached repentance. The voice of John was, so to speak, the echo of Malachi's voice. He took up the subject where the Old Testament prophet left it; and in such a way as we could have supposed him to do, if he had appeared immediately upon Malachi's decease, instead of after an interval of three or four hundred years.

It may be supposed, indeed, that the similarity between them, in their manner of prophesying, may be accounted for by the fact that the leading feature in the character of the Jews, when John appeared, was the very same that it had been in the time of Malachi,—namely, the most presumptuous pride and self-righteousness, connected with great ungodliness. But the similarity referred to does not consist merely in both prophets charging the people with their sin, as both undoubtedly do. There is a still closer resemblance between them than this. The language in which the Baptist expresses himself, and the figures which he employs to illustrate the truths which he delivers, are so much the same with those that Malachi employed, as to render John's preaching like an immediate and uninterrupted continuation of that of the Old Testament prophet. There was an interruption,

as I have already noticed, of several centuries. But the attentive reader cannot fail to observe, on reading together the prophecies of Malachi, and the accounts given by the evangelists of the Baptist's ministry, that the one could not have more clearly appeared to be a continuation of the other, even if John had been the immediate successor of Malachi. The New Testament is thus so closely connected with the Old, as to make us almost forget that there was an interval of some hundreds of years between the last writer of the one, and the first writer of the other. So close, indeed, is this connection, that, I believe, the doctrine taught by the Baptist will be clearly and fully understood only by the help of the light that is thrown upon it by the writings of the prophet Malachi. And how impressively does this remind us of the great truth, that the progress of the divine plans and purposes can suffer no interruption,—that they are steadily advancing towards their fulfilment, while to us they may appear to have been abandoned or forgotten,— that "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness;" but "that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day!"

The resemblance to which I have been referring, between the manner of Malachi's teaching and that of the Baptist, is very strikingly illustrated in the view which they respectively present to us of the character of Christ, and the consequences of his appearing. At the beginning of the third chapter of this book, Malachi predicts concerning Christ, that he would be like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap; that he should sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and that he should purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they might offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. And, at the beginning of the chapter before us, he foretells, of the day of the Lord's coming, that it should burn as an oven, that all the proud, or self-righteous, yea, and all that did wickedly, should be stubble; and that the coming day should burn them up, leaving them neither root nor branch; but, on the other hand, that unto them that feared the name of the Lord, the Sun of righteousness should arise with healing under his wings. Now, the leading idea in these predictions is, that when the Lord appeared, he would make a separation between the righteous and the wicked, the peni-

tent and the impenitent, believers and unbelievers, making the difference between them as palpable as that between silver and dross; and that the ultimate result of the separation would be, that while the one class was dealt with as dross, yea, as stubble that is burned up and consumed, the other class would not only be brought safely through the fiery trial, but be thereby purified and refined, even as silver and gold are purified. Or, to state the import of the prediction without a figure, the prophet foretold that the effect of Christ's coming would be, that the self-righteous and ungodly would become more hardened in their impenitency, and so aggravate their guilt and condemnation; while the humble, the penitent, and the contrite in spirit should receive such communications of the enlightening, quickening, and sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, as would enable them to reflect the image and show forth the glory of God. And this is the very doctrine which the Baptist taught, and which he illustrated, moreover, by the same figure. He announced the immediate coming of Christ, as an event that was to be of an eminently sifting and separating nature,—as the forerunner of a time of judgment,—an intimation of coming wrath; for when "he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" And having admonished them, as Malachi did the Jews of his time, against trusting to their descent from Abraham, as if they had a right to the favour and a claim to the special interposition of God, whatever their character might be, he warned them that the time was come when the great separation foretold in Old Testament prophecy was to take place, whereby hypocrisy was to be exposed, and visited with righteous judgment: "Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And *now* also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." And then he proceeded to illustrate his doctrine by the very figures or symbols which Malachi had employed in teaching the same truth: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than

I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."

By fire, as here used, commentators generally have understood the enlightening, quickening, and purifying efficacy of the Holy Ghost, and, therefore, as designed to explain what the effects would be of men being baptized, as it was foretold that Christ would baptize them. Some, however, are of opinion that as John was addressing the Jews generally, both believers and hypocrites, he employed the word "fire" to express the work, not of purification, but of destruction,—that while to the humble and penitent Christ would impart the grace of the Holy Spirit for their comfort and sanctification, he would be a consuming fire to the self-righteous and impenitent. In this sense, the expression "fire" is frequently used by the prophet Malachi, in connection with "the day of the Lord." So, likewise, it is used by the Baptist, when he says, in the verse immediately preceding that on which I am remarking, "Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." And in the immediately following verse, he makes the same application of the symbol: "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." We thus find in the ministry of John a revival of that of Malachi; the great subject of both being the consequences of Christ's appearing, especially in foretelling that sifting and separating process whereby men might discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that served God and him that served him not. And this separation did begin to take place from the day that Christ entered on his public ministry. Never had the character of men undergone such a scrutiny as that which the Jews underwent, when the Lord himself appeared in the midst of them, making them feel, by the searching truths which he delivered, that he was able not only to tell them all things that ever they did, but to show them what was in their heart; and never was there so clear and palpable a distinction between true and hypocritical professors as was effected by his ministry. While the humble, the penitent, and believing were so purified and refined as to reflect with growing brightness the image of their divine Master, the impenitent were hardened in their impenitency, having the enmity of their carnal

minds against God irritated and strengthened by the very truth which was designed to slay it; until at last the threatened judgment, emphatically foretold as "the day of the Lord," overtook them in all the horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem.

But the trial to which the character of men was subjected by the coming of Christ did not terminate with his personal ministry, or with that of his apostles. In the case of all to whom the Gospel has come, that trial still goes on, though neither in its progress nor in its result may it be so palpable as in the case of the Jews; for it is impossible that the Gospel can leave men as it finds them. If it does not disarm and slay the natural enmity of the carnal mind against God and divine things, it will strengthen that enmity. Men now, indeed, may not be conscious of being irritated and offended by the truth, as it is obvious the Jews generally were. In the case of the Jews, the doctrine, and character, and mighty works of our Lord were so forced upon their attention, that they could not make their escape from the claim which he made upon them to believe in him as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. In such circumstances, therefore, they could not remain in a state of indifference to the subject; and being once aroused, they could not easily fall back again into that state. Their enmity, therefore, was called into activity, as well as strengthened. But it is not so with men now. They may remain in a state of indifference to the Gospel; and even though for a season awakened, they may contrive to recover their former indifference, by resting satisfied with going through a certain routine of what are called Christian exercises and duties; and thus, their conscience being quieted, they may cease to be sensible of any thing like enmity or hatred to the truth. But all the while that enmity may be gathering strength. Their very familiarity with the truths and ordinances of the Gospel will serve only to harden their insensibility to its true value, and render them more inaccessible to saving impressions of the truth. It is thus that every man who hears the Gospel is subjected to a trial by which his true character is to be brought out. That trial is going on. The truth has from day to day some effect on him for good or for evil, whether he be conscious of it or not; and it will be found at last that if the Gospel has not been to him "the savour of life unto life," it has been "the savour of death unto death."

We have seen that the office or commission of the Baptist, as repeatedly foretold in Old Testament prophecy, was that of Forerunner, or Preparer of the way before the Lord. And the nature of this preparation is very fully explained by Malachi: "I will send you Elijah, ... and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." This promise seemed to imply that the ministry of the prophet thus foretold was to be more successful than Malachi's own ministry had been; and if so, we can easily conceive that it must have ministered largely to the consolation of Malachi, and greatly strengthened his faith regarding the future prosperity of the Church, after all the discouragements which he had met with in prophesying to a rebellious and gainsaying people. And a promise which was the last utterance of Old Testament prophecy, and the repetition of which to Zacharias in the temple was the first prophetic voice of New Testament times, must have been fulfilled. John must have been the instrument, in many instances, of turning "the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." Indeed, it is expressly declared that if it had not been so, the coming of the Lord must have been the execution of universal and unsparing judgment: "He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." And what, then, was the nature of the change which it was foretold the Baptist was to effect in many of his countrymen? Taking the words in their literal acceptation, we should naturally conclude that when the Baptist appeared, he was to find prevailing, to a great extent, dissensions and animosities in families, and alienation of heart among those who ought to have been united in the closest bonds of love and affection,—even fathers and children cherishing towards each other bitter hostility. And, no doubt, the Baptist did find a great deal of this; for where there is no love to God, love to man will be found to be a very feeble and fragile thing, the veriest trifle of a worldly kind being sufficient to create a deadly feud between those who were united by the closest ties of relationship.

But heinous as this sin is in all cases, and aggravated as it was in that of the Jews, who were taught, by the whole of God's

dealings with them, to regard themselves in their national capacity as one family, and, therefore, bound in an especial manner to manifest mutual love and affection, yet we cannot conceive that this prevalence of unnatural alienation and mutual animosity was the only evil which John was sent to reprove and to correct. Indeed, such a supposition is inconsistent with what the prophets foretold, and what the evangelists have recorded of that ungodly generation to which the Baptist was sent. There is good ground then, I think, for the opinion of those who understand that by "the fathers" is meant the godly of former and purer times, and by "the children" the men of that generation to which John ministered. The prophet represents these fathers as alienated from their posterity,—that is to say, if they had been alive they would have disowned, as no children of theirs, the Jews of the Baptist's time, because of their ungodliness; and, on the other hand, that generation were alienated from their fathers, inasmuch as there was in their heart and life every thing that was opposed to the character of these their godly predecessors. This was the great evil which the ministry of the Baptist was designed to cure; and it was cured in the case of all whom, by the blessing of God, he was instrumental in bringing to true repentance. In consequence of that change, which was nothing less than being turned from sin unto God, they became such as their godly forefathers would have regarded with complacency, and would gladly have acknowledged as their children; while they themselves, in virtue of the change they had undergone, would begin to admire, and love, and imitate all that was truly excellent in the character of the saints in former times. This interpretation appears to me to bring out the true meaning of the prediction; and it is confirmed, I think, by the manner in which the prediction was repeated by the angel to Zacharias: "He shall go before him,"—that is, the Lord,—"in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

The main subject, then, of the Baptist's preaching was the doctrine of repentance. To what extent, indeed, his ministry was successful, we cannot say. But we are informed that vast multitudes went out to him, "and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins;" and though all who did so might

not be true penitents, yet we may be assured from the prophecy that there were many such, and that all who were so were ready to believe in and embrace the Saviour. They were the "people prepared for the Lord." And though his preaching was, in substance, what had been preached by the Old Testament prophets from the beginning, yet there was a fullness in his doctrine which was not, and which could not be in the doctrine of those who preceded him. Like them, of course, he could direct those whom he urged to repent to the ordinances of Moses, wherein was prefigured the great atonement by which alone sin could be forgiven, and without some believing apprehension of which there could be no genuine repentance. But he was enabled to do more than this. While he gave them, in the baptism which he was commissioned to administer, a sign or token of forgiveness, he was enabled, also, to tell them that He who could procure for and bestow upon them all spiritual blessings was already in the midst of them, and would soon be manifested: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." John had, moreover, very large communications made to him in regard both to the person and work of Christ. When Jesus came from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized of John, "the heavens," we are told, "were opened unto him, and he,"—that is, John,—"saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and, lo! a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Baptist, then, must have entertained very profound views of the character of Christ, as exhibiting in his person that marvellous combination of all the lowliness of humanity, with the glorious attributes of divinity, which had been ascribed to him in Old Testament prophecy. But the Baptist must have had a very clear apprehension, also, of the work of Christ as Mediator,—not only of his office, as bestowing spiritual blessings upon his people, by baptizing them with the Holy Ghost, but of the manner, also, in which he was to procure these blessings; for it is recorded of John, that on two different occasions he pointed out Jesus to those who were by him, with these remarkable words, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." We cannot help con-

cluding, I think, from this language, that it was given to the Baptist to understand that Christ was to be the great antitype of all the sacrifices of atonement which had been till then offered, and that in him was to be fulfilled, in all the depth and extent of its meaning, the prediction uttered by Abraham, in his reply to Isaac on the mount, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering."

How far the disciples of John understood their master's doctrine, we cannot tell. We know that it was the doctrine which our Lord's own disciples were slow of heart to understand, even after it had been more fully explained to them. But now that its meaning cannot be misunderstood, it presents to us the ministry of the Baptist, not as of a mere local or temporary interest, but as of permanent and universal application. He warned sinners that the great and dreadful day of the Lord was at hand, and urged upon them the necessity of repenting and turning from sin unto God; and with this, he directed them to the great atonement which had been foretold and prefigured from the beginning, and was about to be completed in the person of Christ, whom he pointed out as "the Lamb of God,"—the Lamb of God's own providing,—"which taketh away the sin of the world." And what was this, as now fully explained to us, but the sum and substance of apostolic preaching, as stated by the apostle Paul in his address to the elders of the Church of Ephesus? "I kept back nothing," says he, "that was profitable unto you, but have showed unto you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." The Baptist's preaching, then, is as applicable to men now, as it was to the Jews of old; and much of the language which he employed in speaking to them might be addressed to us. We might be told, as they were, that the great and dreadful day of the Lord awaits us,—a day of which that whereof the Jews were more immediately warned was but a type or figure. It may be a long time, indeed, before that day actually comes; but it is only a very short time that we have to prepare for it. The kingdom of heaven in regard to us is come. Christ is from day to day gathering out of the world, and translating into that kingdom, those who are to be joint-heirs with himself of its glory.

Have we, individually, been so gathered and translated? Have we already sought, or are we now seeking to press into that kingdom? Has the charge of guilt which the Scriptures bring against us fastened upon our conscience beyond any power of ours to throw it off? Under the convictions thus awakened, have we looked, or are we now looking to "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world," as alone able to bring relief and enlargement to our straitened spirits? Have we experienced, or do we feel that we must not and cannot rest until we experience, the healing virtue of the Saviour's blood in pacifying our wounded conscience? And have we any good and scriptural ground to believe, that in the prospect of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, we have found "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest?" If we cannot answer all or any of these questions in the affirmative, then in what other language can we be addressed than that by which John sought to awaken the slumbering and impenitent among the Jews? Our condition differs not essentially from theirs. The day of the Lord in regard to us is at hand, because the day is very near which must determine, beyond the possibility of change, what in our case the day of the Lord shall be. Already "the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

THE END.

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